# HEIRS

By CORNELIA JAMES CANNON
*Author of* RED RUST

## CORNELIA JAMES CANNON

is the author of "Red Rust," which was among the first four best sellers throughout the United States when it appeared in the spring of 1928. Martha Ostenso, author of "Wild Geese," said of it: "It has a quality of freshness, aliveness, that one rarely comes upon in books these days. The simplicity and honesty of the style are odd and striking." Many leading critics endorsed Miss Ostenso's estimate of Mrs. Cannon's first novel—the story of an immigrant boy's struggle to perfect a rust-proof strain of wheat for his people.

Mrs. Cannon was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and lived there during her girlhood. She is the wife of Dr. Walter Bradford Cannon, George Higginson Professor of Physiology at the Harvard University Medical School. They have five children. Mrs. Cannon is a graduate of Radcliffe of the class of 1899, a member of the governing body of that college, and a director of the Massachusetts Parent-Teacher Association.

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*By the same author*

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CORNELIA JAMES CANNON

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To
W. B. C.

# PART ONE

# CHAPTER I

As the train moved in a leisurely fashion through the New Hampshire country, with every click on the rails drawing nearer to the little mill town of Lovell, Marilla Lamprey scanned each rough pasture and wooded hillside with eager eyes. She was to begin her new life among these hills, and a hovering, hardly recognized dread of the unknown made her quick to note the likenesses and differences between these rugged slopes and rocky outcrops and the lower and more rounded fields and wood lots of her childhood home in the southern part of the state. The similarities softened her pang of homesickness, and the bolder landscape fed her spirit of adventure with a delicious sense of the new and the untried awaiting her.

She sat in the dingy car, leaning forward on the red plush seat, and her eyes followed the passing scene with absorbed attention. She had taken off her hat and laid it beside her. Her dark, abundant hair, braided and coiled round her head in the manner of a bygone time, made a soft frame round her face. She might have passed for the original of some old daguerreotype had not her vivid look belied the superficial resemblance of fashion and form. Her beauty was of a type dear to the artist, almost classic in the regularity and clearness of feature, with lines of character chiseled on that austere background by the thoughts and rebellions of the modern. A faint look of melancholy lay just beneath the surface of her expression like a wavering shadow under clear waters. She had the slender physique of the typical New England women of the early days whose gravestones, designating them as the first, second, or third wife of some stalwart pioneer husband, are found in the old graveyards. Those pioneer women had toiled, year in, year out, to bring up

their children in the fear of God and in the service of cleanliness, and their narrowed chests and worn frames had proved only too fertile a field for the deadly germ of consumption. Marilla's own grandmother had coughed her life away in a little farmhouse on the hills of Fairfield, and her mother had died twenty years ago of the same dread malady. Marilla could feel even now the desolating pang of that loss, for which nothing in her life had ever seemed to compensate. As her eyes caught glimpses of small gray houses hidden in folds of the mountains, she wondered how many were perhaps to-day sheltering the long fight against the disease. She had early determined that there should be no more victims of the white plague among the Lampreys, and had lived as much as she could in the sunshine and fresh air. At her graduation from the normal school she had led her entire class in vigor of both mind and body.

Years of teaching in little white schoolhouses near her home in Fairfield had not lessened her bodily energy, but they had filched the first bloom of youth from her face, leaving in its place the more subtle marks of thought and feeling which, to those who have eyes to see, are more enduringly beautiful than the fleeting loveliness of girlhood.

As the train rumbled along between the rudely sculptured hills, Marilla was like a ship with parted cable, moving without conscious effort from the accustomed moorings into unfamiliar waters. But there was neither anxiety nor regret in her heart. Lovell was to her no less the enchanted goal than were the Happy Isles to the mariners of old who loosed their anchors and set sail for the open sea. She caught herself smiling now and then at the people standing on little station platforms where the train seemed to stop to make a friendly call rather than to do any real business. The men and women

who saw her did not smile back. They stared instead without change of expression. But their indifference could not affect the exuberance of her mood. Outward circumstance had no part in its radiance. Though she was twenty-eight years old, she was once more charged with the unquenchable spirit of youth.

The train stopped at a little flag station where the brakeman helped a solitary passenger to the platform. As he walked back through the car he announced in a loud voice, "Next station Lovell." When he passed Marilla, who turned from the window at his call, he stopped and said, pleasantly, "Your station, miss," and then added, glancing at the gray telescope bag precariously balanced in the rack over her head, "I 'll carry your bag out for you."

She thanked him with a happy feeling that the world was kind. When he went on, she turned back hurriedly to the window to miss nothing of the country which was so soon to be her home. The train was passing down a narrow valley with a tumbling mountain stream winding in and out among worn gray boulders. Through an opening in the trees a small dam swung into view, its impounded waters lying clear and unruffled in the still September air. Over the spillway, whose rim was green and mossy, ran a tiny trickle of water sparkling in the sun. From beneath the little building which housed the gate control a great, round, hoop-bound penstock emerged, stretched along the ground like a giant snake. It took no heed of the curves of the brook bed, but moved beside the train, at one time crossing the stream on a trestle, at another running on a level embankment of its own. Now and then it disappeared in the underbrush, only to return again, its direction always downward with the rushing brook. Here and there a tiny thread of water, revealing the burden it carried, spurted out

between warped boards of the wooden sheath, and found its way back again into the hurrying stream.

A sudden turn in the track cut Marilla off from sight of the little valley. The engine whistled, the train slowed down, and almost immediately came to a jerky stop at a small red wooden station with the name "Lovell" painted on a sign at the platform end. The brakeman came hurrying in and pulled Marilla's bag from the rack.

"Here you are, miss," he said, cheerily, and started for the door. He ran down the steps and, after hastily setting the bag on the platform, turned back to help Marilla. She stopped to thank him shyly as she reached the ground.

"That 's all right," he said, heartily. "Pretty little town. Going to stay long?"

"I hope so," she said, smiling back at him. "If they want me to," she added, as if in explanation.

"They sure will!" observed the young man, gallantly. He touched his cap to her, and lifted his hand to signal the conductor that all passengers for Lovell were out of the car.

Marilla watched him swing himself aboard the moving train and then, drawing a deep breath as though putting the past definitely behind her, turned eagerly to see in what kind of place the new adventure of her life was to begin.

The superintendent of schools at Lovell, Mr. Osburn, under whom she was to teach, had written that he would meet her at the station and take her to her boarding house. The school in which she was to teach was about two miles from the centre of the town and it would be necessary for her to live with a neighbor. Mr. Osburn had said that he felt sure he could find some farmer's wife to board her during the school months.

Marilla looked up and down the station platform, but no Mr. Osburn was in sight. The train had pulled out of the station and disappeared, leaving a vague swirling mist of smoke along the track where its solid bulk had been. Still there was no sign of Mr. Osburn. Marilla picked up her bag and carried it over to the station truck on which her trunk had been tossed from the door of the baggage car. She stood near it, undecided what to do, when the station agent, a round-faced young man in khaki coveralls, who had gone hurriedly into the office just as the train was starting away, came out again and called to her as he walked down the platform, "Are you the new school-teacher?"

"Yes," she answered, with quick relief at his words. "I 'm waiting for Mr. Osburn. He promised to meet me."

"He just called me up on the station phone to say he 's on his way. His car broke down and he 's gettin' it fixed quick as he can," explained the agent, adding grimly, "He 'll be along some time to-day. He 's got the worst auto in the township. Sid Brown sold it to him. Sid was goin' to throw it on the dump, but Osburn come along and paid him real money for it. The old Prof likes to tinker, and this car sure keeps him busy."

Marilla was smilingly interested and expressed her astonishment at the endless ability of dilapidated automobiles to go. As the agent picked up her bag and carried it into the waiting room for her, he described in detail a car he had made of various parts rescued from a junk pile.

"I would n't sell that car to-day for a hundred dollars," he ended, emphatically.

He settled Marilla comfortably on a wooden seat

where, from the semi-darkness of the dingy interior, she could watch for the coming of Mr. Osburn.

"Not that you need to see," the agent commented, with a grin. "You 'll be deaf from the rattle long before the old ruin gits anywhere near."

He went out again, and she could hear him whistling at his work at the end of the platform and in and out of the baggage room.

The station was soon deserted. Except for the rumble of the truck and the banging of boxes and crates as they were being unloaded, there was silence. Marilla looked through the open door at the sunny road and the green trees that grew along its edge. Almost against her will the solitude was forcing her to think again of the experiences of a lonely youth she would rather have forgotten.

The only child of a man broken by life, who had expected her to find his silent companionship and the care of the shabby farmhouse satisfaction enough, she had few joyous memories to relive. She had filled her empty heart with the daydreams of a craving nature. Her favorite play had been to imagine herself a member of a large family, and she had borrowed the neighbors' children that the old house, full of sorrows, might echo with the tumult of young laughter. Her father found the little visitors, who demanded constant attention from Marilla, a discomfort and an annoyance, but he suppressed his disapproval of them as he suppressed all his other emotions. The children never objected to coming up the steep hill to the farm, for Marilla had endless resources for their amusement. She had read every book on which she could lay her hands, and her memory was filled with stories which she was always ready to tell to a child cuddled in her lap.

In the modest farmhouse library, on a shelf above the

fireplace, was a volume of poetry, *Fairest Gems of English Verse*. Marilla had read and reread the book until its imagery had become a part of her. At her work in the house or in her wanderings over the hills, lines from the poems floated through her mind, bringing vivid pictures to the inward eye or thoughts of consolation to her troubled spirit. Wordsworth and Tennyson might have been writing of this very New England country in which she was born, and of the patient and limited lives her neighbors were living about her. As she grew older, her feeling of kinship with the great English tradition, which was her own forefathers' no less than the poets' whose words sang in her ears, became more real and more intense. What was she, or those among whom she lived, but England transplanted to another continent and destined to carry out, in a more plastic world, the ideas and ideals which had forced the Magna Carta from a reluctant monarch and broken with the Church of Rome? The books she was able to find in Fairfield farmhouses only confirmed her in this conviction. She seldom came up the long road from the town without carrying a volume, faded and shabby, bound in dingy cloth or leather, which she had found tucked away in an old secretary or forgotten in a dark attic since the time when it had been brought home from a distant city where such commodities were sold, by some early enthusiast for learning. None of the books contained a suggestion of any other culture than the English, and their teachings fitted into one another as neatly as the cluster boxes of a child. Her restless mind was not satisfied, however, to learn of England alone. She was impatient to know more of those other races of many languages and complexions who lived in lands romantically named and brilliantly colored in her antiquated school geography. She pored over the book by

the hour, her curiosity only whetted by its brief and inconclusive paragraphs about the habits and customs of the races of the earth.

She asked endless questions of the man who came as minister to the Fairfield church when she was sixteen. He had become interested in the hungry-minded girl and shared with her such books as he had and such ideas as life had allowed him. He could not give her much satisfaction as to the inhabitants of the globe beyond Fairfield, except to tell her that there were two kinds of people in the world, Christian and heathen, the one predestined to bring light to the other. But this was not what she wanted to know.

She had read, in such papers and magazines as found their way to the farmhouse, of the great influx of non-English-speaking people into the country during the decade following 1900, but she knew little about them from personal experience. Few of the immigrants had come to Fairfield and none had stayed there. But Marilla cherished a faith, a Jeffersonian legacy to the descendants of the sturdy democrats of 1776, that many people may become one, and she only waited the opportunity to know her new fellow citizens in the flesh.

The minister shook his head dubiously when she questioned him. Most of his parishes had been rural, and he had heard little talk of the immigrant. He did remember one of his parishioners who insisted that Italians were hard-working and should be encouraged to come to this country, in spite of the fact that they could not speak English and were rumored to eat spaghetti three times a day. His neighbors had not welcomed the presence of the swarthy, dark-eyed people, but he had protested, "We 've got to have someone to do the digging for us, have n't we?"

If the minister could not answer all her questions, he

nevertheless did something for Marilla for which she was ever after grateful. Impressed by the girl's intellectual promise, he persuaded her father, whose initiative and courage seemed to have been buried with his young wife, to let her go to the normal school to prepare herself for teaching. The normal school was not a great educational institution, but one or two of its teachers were unusual, and its library, larger than any to which she had ever dreamed of having access, opened to her a world for which she had been unconsciously searching from her earliest days.

Marilla smiled a little as she recalled the girl she once had been, shabbily dressed, running joyously from building to building, interrogating a teacher, working as a waitress for her room and board, discussing with a classmate, or carrying from the library an armful of books to be read in the quiet hours of the night.

"They must have found me a dreadful nuisance," she thought, "but I was drunk with the excitement of new ideas."

After her graduation she had gone back to spend the summer with her father on the farm. In September she was to teach in a graded school in Manchester, a position which had been offered to the normal-school student graduating with the highest scholastic record.

When she first saw her father, after a ten months' absence, she was shocked at the change in him. His rheumatism, which had been troubling him for years, had spread until it seemed to involve every joint in his body. He looked and moved like an old man, and she could see that much of his silence had become a quiet endurance of pain. Before the summer was over, it was clear that the time had come when he must depend upon her, not only for care in his crippled condition, but for support as well. After a wrestle with inner protests and rebellions, the

position in Manchester was given up and one in Fairfield taken instead. Marilla's dream of a happy life in the city changed almost overnight to the reality of a life divided between hours of teaching in a little country schoolhouse and days and nights of tending a taciturn invalid in a gray farmhouse back on the hills.

Until her father's death Marilla, in addition to teaching, had run the farm as well as she could with the assistance of hired men who came and went in an endless procession of feeble mentality and incompetence. During the eight years of the unequal struggle, the farm gradually returned to the more primitive state from which it had been wrested by the labor of generations. Each winter the frost forced more rocks to the surface of the ploughed land. Each summer the roots of the witch grass in the unturned hayfields became more entangled and the soil more impoverished, until the great bays in the barn, which in the days of the farm's prosperity were filled to bursting with the sweet-smelling hay, had ample storage space for harrows and horserakes, standing rusty and grimed on the bare floor, with nothing between them and the beams of the roof but looped cobwebs heavy with the accumulated dust of disuse.

She thought of her father with unforgetting affection, but after his death she did not permit herself an anguished sense of loss. Death had been for him a blessed relief from the suffering and tedium of living. She knew that her sacrificed youth had been able to soften the tragedy of his helpless invalidism, and that certainty was a comfort in the desolation of heart that came when she was left alone.

He had never seemed to expect or wish for more than she could give him. But she had a conviction, born of her sympathy and compassion, that years before, perhaps when her mother died, he had made his terms with

life and disciplined himself to accept without question what was still to be endured. She lavished upon him a tenderness of pitying love, but there had been hours at night when, too tired to sleep, she had lain awake and fancied with a quick shudder that she was caring for a man who had long since ceased to live and whose shell alone was left to accept the tendance of her hands. When the end came, she had mourned, not that he was gone, but that fate had not dealt more generously with him while he lived.

The isolation of the two lives might have fixed morbid habits in the mind of the girl if it had not been for her hours in the schoolroom, dealing with the simplicity and directness of childhood. The years that were filled with denial of the yearnings and passions of youth offered her, through contact with her pupils, an outlet for the warmth of her nature which, unexpressed, might have wrought destruction to its possessor. She once said to a schoolmate of hers who had married and lived near by, "You have two children, but I have twenty."

From the beginning she was an inventive and stimulating teacher, finding, in the need to make learning attractive to inactive minds, a spur to her own.

The younger pupils were her special amusement and delight. When they took their places in an important little row in the front seats, struggling, with wriggles and twists of effort, to pronounce the words in their dog-eared first readers, her face was lighted with smiles which the sober little people took for high approval.

"The teacher we had before you," said one little girl, "would n't let us get near her. She said we might dirty her dress."

Marilla laughed.

"You see I like you better than dresses," she said; "and clothes can be washed, can't they?"

At home that night the child repeated Marilla's words.

"Too bad she has n't any children of her own," said the mother, looking at the baby in her lap.

"She 's in luck," answered the child's father, slouching in the corner by the stove. "A good salary and no one to take care of but herself! What 's she want with a lot of yelling kids?"

The mother did not reply, but when she carried the drowsy baby to his bed she tucked him in with a more lingering touch than usual.

Marilla had quickly impressed Mr. Osburn, who was the district superintendent of the Fairfield schools at the time, with her ability. He not only allowed her to develop original ways of teaching, but encouraged her to follow out her own ideas, regardless of the prescribed curriculum. Several months after her father's death he left to take a better position in a mill town further north. From there he had written asking her to come in September to teach in Lovell. He offered her the same kind of work at double her salary.

It was like a fresh summons to life. The shadow of melancholy which had begun to settle upon her as she passed her solitary days in the old homestead with its echoing loneliness suddenly lifted, and she could bear to think of the future. There was nothing to hold her to Fairfield. Those ragged fields and cut-over wood lots were dear to her, but only as the graves of those we have loved are dear to us. Perhaps when she was old she could come back to find the bittersweet of memory a solace, but now, with her vanishing youth calling to her, she could not leave the familiar hillsides soon enough.

She dragged down from the attic an old leather-covered trunk of her grandfather's, full of worn diaries in which he had recorded the weather, the plantings, and the maturing of the crops. She burned the diaries and

packed the trunk with her clothes and personal belongings. Save for a few pieces of furniture, associated in her mind with her parents and with the generations which had lived and died in the old home before them, she sold everything for which she could find a buyer.

When the day of her departure came and the door was closed for the last time, she turned away without once looking back at the gray house and barn. She dared not invite the pangs such a last glimpse might rouse. Her face was resolutely set on a future which should better the past.

The keys to the old doors, the very substance of whose wrinkled panels was weathering away, were left in the care of the postmistress, who would let Marilla know if anyone wanted to harvest the thin grass of the fields or to cut the few scattered trees still left in the wood lot.

She took with her nothing but memory and hope, each of which in turn possessed her mind and determined her passing mood.

## CHAPTER II

In about twenty minutes the wheezing and coughing of a defective engine was audible through the open door.

"That 's him," said the agent, coming into the waiting room and picking up Marilla's bag. "Can tell him half a mile off."

The noise suddenly ceased, and a shabby Ford came to an abrupt stop at the end of the platform. A tall, gray-haired man stepped nimbly from the driver's seat and greeted Marilla with enthusiasm. His large, brown-rimmed glasses, resting on the slant of his nose, gave him the look of a wise insect, which his long legs and prominent ears, standing out like warning signals from the sides of his head, only accentuated. He wore a loose-fitting suit of clothes which seemed in imminent danger of being rent apart by the jerky energy of his movements, but his expression was kindly, and the bustling competence of his manner was of a type to encourage rather than discourage the diffident. He seized Marilla's bag, threw it on the back seat, opened the car door, and was about to help her in when the agent remarked, "Guess you can get her trunk in the back there, too."

"Certainly can," answered Mr. Osburn briskly. He turned to Marilla, waving his hand in the general direction of the car with an air of boundless confidence. "You can't hurt that machine. I haul school supplies from one end of the county to the other in it. Once when I could n't get wood to a school in time for a cold snap, I took out the cushion and carried enough sticks in the back there to keep the school warm for a week."

The station agent had, meanwhile, wheeled up the truck, and he and Mr. Osburn cautiously lifted the trunk and settled it in place. As he straightened up, the agent remarked, "Don't let Morrison get his eye on that trunk.

He 'd steal it for his antique store. Some millionaire from Boston 'd pay him a hundred dollars for it and set it in his parlor to keep his jewelry in."

"There are all sorts of fools in the world," observed Mr. Osburn to Marilla as he helped her to her seat, "but Morrison gets the pick of them. You show me an antique shop and I 'll show you the morons' paradise."

He went round to the other side of the car and climbed briskly into his place behind the steering wheel. The agent shut the door on Marilla's side with a sharp bang. He had to do it twice before the catch held. Then he stood a moment, his hands resting on the rusted top, where the frayed imitation-leather lining was held precariously by a few tacks.

"I got an uncle up north," he said, "makes them old-fashioned settees that turn into tables. He scratches 'em up a little and leaves 'em out in the rain till they get kind of worn-lookin', and then he puts one out on his front porch when the summer people go ridin' by. He sets in it and leans back as if he 'd done a big day's work. Everybody that stops he tells how he can remember his grandsir settin' in that very seat, smokin' his pipe before there was a railroad tie in the whole of the White Mountains. As soon as he sells one at a big price he brings out another, and keeps right on rememberin' his grandsir settin' in 'em. He can't make them settees fast enough to satisfy the tourists."

They all laughed, and Marilla, who could remember looking with envious eyes at the cheap black trunk of a classmate at the normal school, leaned over to touch the smooth, hairy surface of her family heirloom with a new pride of possession.

"Perhaps I could get the hundred dollars for it myself," she ventured, visions of what she might do with such a sum dancing before her eyes.

"You have n't got the gall," answered the agent with a broad grin. "Morrison 's got a thicker hide than your trunk's, or he could n't ask the prices he does and keep a straight face while he 's doin' it."

He lifted his hands from the door as the car, with agonized groans and snorts of protest, started forward.

"That 's a neat little woman," he said to himself. "Here 's hopin' I see her again."

He turned back into the station shed to sort out the baggage before going to his dinner at the fly-haunted boarding house across the track.

"I 've got a first-rate place for you to live," said Mr. Osburn, when they had left the station behind. "Mrs. Rogers' — a few minutes' walk from the school. She and her husband are nice people and you 'll like them."

As the car reached the main road, which ran along the edge of a narrow valley, Marilla saw the town of Lovell spread out before her. The hills on both sides of the valley were dotted with white houses, brilliant against the green slopes like patches of snow left after the spring thaws. Up the steep sides roads zigzagged to the top, where Marilla could catch glimpses of larger and more pretentious houses shrouded in trees or boldly exposed to the sun and winds on jutting heights. The elm-lined road which they were following had buildings along one side, a white-steepled church and meetinghouse, and a town hall, but on the other side it dropped sharply to the river. On the narrow banks of the stream below them but safely above the level of high water were a few straggling rows of small houses close to a big three-story factory building. The penstock which had run along the railroad track here abruptly ended its journey by plunging beneath the walls of the mill. The dark red building occupied the entire width of the valley, the two main divisions connected across the river by a narrow foot-

bridge. Its many windows gleamed in the sun, and through them the bare interior looked like a hollow shell within which a few ghostly machines lifted angular arms to the roof. The passer-by, loitering along the sidewalk above, could almost see down the chimney, from which in winter the smoke from the heating plant poured out. When the windows were open, he could hear the whir of the machines and, far below, the rush of the released waters, their work done, escaping to rejoin the parent stream.

"That 's the Lovell Woolen Mill that supports us all," said Mr. Osburn, nodding his head in the direction of the building whose top windows were just visible from the road. "Started by Silas Walton in 1830. Made satinet in those days. Don't suppose you know what that is. Did n't myself till I asked one of the old-timers, but your great-grandmother and mine wore nothing else, and old Walton was famous for the quality of his product. They are n't making it any more. This generation 's too fancy for good-wearing cloth without much looks. Just as soon have stuff made of shoddy from rags collected in the slums of Europe, so long as the color 's bright and it 'll wear out quick enough to let 'em have a new dress before they get tired of the old."

Marilla laughed.

"I don't believe even the men are entirely averse to having a new suit now and then," she challenged. Then she added, looking at the tree-covered heights, beyond the mill, "The wool in those days came from sheep raised on these mountains, I suppose?"

"Yes, but it does n't any more," he answered. "It comes in bales from New Mexico and New Zealand and goodness knows what other places. It 's funny economics. I don't understand it. We import raw materials from the West and raw workers from across the

ocean and try to make 'em both into something. This town 's full of Australian wool and foreign factory hands."

"But what would you do?" asked Marilla, trying to recall fragmentary discussions on economics overheard at the normal school. "Get everybody to emigrate to Australia? Or turn New Hampshire into a stone quarry?"

"The whole matter will take care of itself without our help," answered Mr. Osburn, shrugging his shoulders. "When all the mills go into bankruptcy and the mill workers have to pay more for food and clothes than they are paid for their work, the job will be done. You and I 'll have to move out to the corn belt and do our educating there."

"I 'm not sure I would n't like it," said Marilla, clinging to the side of the car as it bounced out of a rut. "That 's where everybody from Fairfield 's gone, and I never knew any of them want to come back for more than a visit."

"Money mad," observed Mr. Osburn. "Never satisfied to work on the farms as their fathers did. Always wanting to discover gold mines and live in luxury."

"I don't think it 's quite that," answered Marilla, shouting to make herself heard above the din of the engine. "I think they prefer to build new homes rather than everlastingly reshingle the old ones."

"Nothing in that," declared Mr. Osburn, throwing on more gas as they reached a smoother stretch of road. "They 're the very people that buy Morrison out of his antiques at any price he has a mind to ask."

Marilla was silenced, not by the argument but by the speed at which they were going. For the next mile she clung to the arm of the seat lest she be ignominiously bounced out on the side of the road.

The valley widened a little as they left the town behind them. The farms beside the road had ploughed fields around their buildings, and pastures and mowings on the hills behind. It was early in September, and the hay had all been harvested. The fresh green of the gardens had turned to brown, and the tawny color of fall was beginning to dominate the landscape. The goldenrod, that heralded prophet of autumn which so deceptively appears in the middle of July, lent its glow of beauty to the roadside. Here and there a branch of maple bore in its reddened leaves promise of the more gorgeous colors yet to come.

As they drove along, each farmyard seemed to Marilla to be full of children. Babies were playing in the dirt in front of the barns, larger children were working in the gardens. An occasional young girl could be seen, stooped over a washtub or hanging wet clothes on a line.

"It looks as if I were going to have plenty to do," said Marilla, speaking close to Mr. Osburn's ear. "Where do all the children come from?"

"Polanders," answered Mr. Osburn, his eyes intent on the roadway, where some distracted hens were zigzagging to escape his oncoming wheels. "Most of these farms have been bought by them. Work in the mills all day and run the farms for rest and recreation."

He added, as he turned to her with a smile of achievement after the last hen had been safely passed, "They say the Europeans could live on what the ordinary American throws away. If that 's true of food, I believe it 's still truer of time. I never knew till I saw these Polanders what we might accomplish if we worked the hours we spend on amusing ourselves. I 've calculated that Mrs. Osburn and I could plant, weed, and dig two acres of potatoes and still have time to raise carrots and onions

and play the saxophone if we worked instead of teaching our dog tricks."

Marilla laughed. "But would n't there be danger of too many potatoes?" she asked.

"Not for me," answered Mr. Osburn, emphatically. "I 'd like them three times a day, myself. I don't get them as often as that. Mrs. Osburn does n't care for them, and won't let me have them except for dinner and supper."

The car swung abruptly into a farmyard where, under a great elm tree, stood a white house connected by a shed with a big unpainted barn. The house was a story and a half high. Its windows were small-paned and narrow, its eaves wide and overhanging, and the central chimney rose above the roof, square and heavy. A porch ran along the side, shaded with woodbine which had already begun to show a touch of the autumn coloring. Behind the barn was a field, and beyond that the wooded hills piled up one behind the other.

"Here we are," said Mr. Osburn, bringing the car to a stop. "Mrs. Rogers objected to taking you at first, but I told her you could n't live with the Polanders and if she did n't take you there would n't be any school. That fetched her. She was a teacher herself years ago when she was a girl."

While he was talking, Mr. Osburn climbed out of the car and forced open the door which penned in Marilla. A little elderly woman in a gingham dress was visible standing behind the side door, whose screen was fringed with strips of slit paper to drive away the flies when it was opened or closed. Marilla could see that she wore a starched white apron round her waist, and that her gray hair was held severely in place by large celluloid side combs of a style long since abandoned by the followers of fashion. When Marilla and Mr. Osburn

walked up to the porch, the woman opened the door and came out. Her thin face was covered with fine wrinkles like a crisscross of delicately etched lines, but her cheeks had a color as clear as that of youth and, though she carried herself stiffly erect, the deep blue of her eyes suggested a hidden softness somewhere beneath the severe exterior. Mr. Osburn lifted his hat to her.

"This is the new teacher," he said, in the hearty manner of one conferring a favor. "Miss Lamprey, this is Mrs. Rogers, who makes the finest lemon pie in New Hampshire."

The woman's smile was of the briefest. She shook hands with the newcomer, ran a practised eye over the baggage in the car, and turned to Mr. Osburn.

"Obadiah won't be home till night," she said, shortly. "Could you get that trunk in the house for me?"

Marilla caught a glimpse of a spotless kitchen through the screen door before she ran down the steps to help Mr. Osburn bring in the trunk. Her spirits, a little depressed by Mrs. Rogers' manners, revived. She would be made externally comfortable at any rate.

The calfskin cover of the trunk, which the station agent had been so quick to notice, elicited no comment from Mrs. Rogers. She led the way, without further word, to a bedroom on the first floor.

The room was in the front of the house, with windows on two sides. The woodwork was freshly painted white and the floor, on which were spread two or three rag rugs, was a light gray. The bedroom furniture, varnished in yellow, was of an ugly pattern admired by a generation which had turned its back on the colonial designs and yet failed to create lines of beauty for itself. But Marilla was not critical. The bureau had drawers, the wardrobe had hooks, on the washstand stood a generous pitcher and bowl decorated with large red roses, and on bed and

bureau were white covers of the spotless cleanliness dear to the New England heart. The window shades were drawn down and the light in the room was subdued.

With Marilla's help Mr. Osburn had set the trunk against the wall near the door and had then gone out to bring in the bag. Marilla turned to Mrs. Rogers with a smile.

"How nice it is!" she exclaimed. "May I put up the shades?"

"Yes, if you want to," said Mrs. Rogers, a little doubtfully. "The windows look right on the road and people might be passin' and look in."

"I 'll let the white curtains protect me," answered Marilla. "I love the sunshine so much I don't think I could get along without it. I take it instead of medicine."

"It fades things," said Mrs. Rogers, sharply. "If you 're sickly, you 'd better try yarb tea for medicine."

"Oh, I have," answered Marilla, smiling to herself with a sudden familiar feeling that she had known Mrs. Rogers for a long time. "My grandmother used to make me take it when I was a tiny child. But I never thought it did me any good."

She had raised the shades and parted the curtains at a front window. The view across a strip of lawn to the horizon, clear and distinct in the distance, was uninterrupted. On the other side of the road the land ran down sharply to the valley through which the stream took its way, but the eye was drawn irresistibly to the deep blue masses of hills and mountains above it like stage scenery boldly set against the pale sky. She could see an occasional farmhouse in a little clearing on the lower slopes, making human and intimate what might otherwise have seemed remote and unapproachable.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed, turning with shining face to Mrs. Rogers. "How you must love this view!"

"It adds," said Mrs. Rogers, straightening the bureau cover, "but I don't get much time for views. I've got my work to do."

Marilla smiled to herself, recognizing the conscientious New England housekeeper in the words as a musician might recall familiar music from a brief phrase.

Just then Mr. Osburn came in with the bag and, after explaining to Marilla that he would return in the morning to take her to the opening of school, departed and left her to settle herself in her new home. She had just started to unpack, stopping every now and then to look from the window and breathe the fragrant sweetness of the September noon, when Mrs. Rogers called to her that her dinner was ready.

In the dining room, darkened to keep out the flies, a single place was set.

"I had some tea and bread before you came," explained Mrs. Rogers, briefly, when Marilla protested at her not eating, too.

"I hope you are n't going to make me eat alone," said Marilla, imploringly. "It takes away my appetite."

Mrs. Rogers' expression softened a little.

"I had some boarders this summer that asked to eat alone, and I thought maybe you 'd be the same kind," she explained. "But if you want, Obadiah and I 'll sit down with you. He 's a great hand to talk, Obadiah is, and he likes somebody new to talk to."

"I want him to tell me all about this region," said Marilla. "I like to teach the school children about the place where they live and how their forefathers settled the country, in the days when there was nothing except Indians and forests around. My pupils in Fairfield got

interested and brought all kinds of Revolutionary relics to me, and began hunting for Indian arrowheads, until we had a regular little museum in the school."

"All these children 'll ever learn is what easy jobs their fathers got in the Lovell mill, ten years ago. Their forefathers never did anything to settle this country except carry big pay envelopes home Saturday nights. Found something soft all ready for them and took it," said Mrs. Rogers, severely. "*My* ancestors came here on a grant from Massachusetts colony." She went on as if airing a long-cherished grievance: "Some of the children of those days were carried off by the Indians. They tell the story of my great-great-grandfather plantin' his corn with a rifle strapped to his back. It was up on that very hill behind the barn that grew up to woods again fifty years ago."

"That 'll make a nice story to tell," exclaimed Marilla, much pleased. "Are the children in the school all newly come to this country?"

"No, not all of them," answered Mrs. Rogers, setting a dish of apple sauce in front of Marilla and pushing a plate of cakes toward her. "There are the two Hilton children and the Burbank boy that 's a half-wit, and the Fox girl and Jane Smith, but the rest are Polanders. These foreigners seem to have plenty of money to buy the places from the farmers who belong here. They act as if they had a right to settle down and enjoy what our ancestors took nearly two hundred years to get ready for them."

"Still, we do let them into the country," protested Marilla, mildly. "They 've got to go somewhere."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Rogers, heatedly, "but why could n't they have stayed in the steel mills and the mines where they come from? Those are the places for foreigners. The owner of the woolen mill in Lovell got

some of 'em to come up here to work, and now you can't drive 'em away."

"I wonder if they are difficult children to teach?" said Marilla, trying to change the subject a little. "I never met a Pole, myself, but I 've admired them since I read some of their history. What are the children like?"

"I don't know any more about them than I can help," replied Mrs. Rogers, positively, scraping some potatoes at the sink as she talked. "Their fathers and mothers work 'em so hard at home that they don't get round to other people's houses much, and that 's a mercy. There *is* one nice boy that lives a little way down the road — Thaddeus Borek. He helps Obadiah with the hayin', and he 's a good worker. Does n't talk much, but he 's always got a smile. The rest of 'em, they tell me, are pretty rough. You 'll have a bad time managing 'em. There was a normal-school girl here teachin' last spring had to give up. She was only eighteen and it was her first school. They said she used to cry every day when school was over because the children were so sassy to her."

Marilla smiled sympathetically, remembering her own first term of teaching. "I don't know that I 'd lay that up against the Polish children," she said. "Every young teacher thinks the children in her first school behave dreadfully, but after a year of teaching she knows it was n't the children's fault."

"Well," said Mrs. Rogers, leaving the sink and starting to clear the table, "all I can say is, I hope for the best. We have supper at five, and I like to have meals on time. I 'm never late myself, and I take it as a kindness if no one else is late either."

"I 'll surely remember," answered Marilla, cheerfully, "and if I ever am late, I want you to put everything away

as if I had been here, and I 'll make up by eating twice as much at the next meal."

"I could n't do that," said Mrs. Rogers, brushing the crumbs from the white tablecloth as she spoke. "You pay me for board and it 's due you. When I bargain to do a thing, I keep my word."

Marilla looked a little crestfallen. There could be no careless wanderings in the autumn woods, forgetful of time and place, if she had to conform to such inflexible standards. But she was accustomed to the rigid ways of the New England housekeeper and had learned to curb her nonconforming impulses. Though she sighed a little, she acquiesced. She was really grateful to find herself in a home where, originally accepted as a favor, she could see that she was, after all, to be given generously of whatever it had.

"I think I 'll finish my unpacking," she said, rising, "and then look at the school. It 's just up the road a little way, is n't it? Mr. Osburn told me it was n't far."

"About five minutes' walk from here. It sets back in some trees. Before you go, I want you should see where I keep the key when I go out, so you can let yourself in if the house is locked."

Mrs. Rogers led the way to the side porch. There she made Marilla grope behind a sagging window blind until she found the nail where the key hung, sheltered from observation by a lilac bush that grew as high as the top of the window.

Marilla took a glance round the neat yard. The lawn was mowed close, and a few prim beds of flowers were set here and there in the grass. But, in startling contrast to their meagreness, along the whole length of the shed which connected the house and the barn, grew a splendid row of goldenglow, unhampered and exuberant, with sturdy stems and great flowers standing out against the

gray wall. Marilla exclaimed in admiration. Mrs. Rogers' face showed her pleasure.

"I was born in this house," she said, "and I 've never lived anywhere else. I always thought it was a pretty place, but it never was so pretty before we had those flowers. Obadiah and I went to Newburyport on our weddin' journey and we brought back the roots from the old home of his folks on an island in the Piscataqua River. Obadiah planted 'em that spring, and since then I can't remember a year when the goldenglow was not blossomin' like that. Obadiah and I take lots of care of it, for it seems kind of special to us. My mother used to set great store by it, too. I don't know what I 'd do if anything happened to that patch of flowers."

With a careful, delicate touch, unlike her quick ways, she straightened a stem, which was top-heavy with great blossoms. Marilla looked at her in surprise. Was it possible that, with all her practicality, Mrs. Rogers had a vein of poetry behind her austere and unyielding exterior? Marilla knew it was as much a tradition for the New England woman to tend her flowers as to scour her kitchen floor, but this seemed something different. Perhaps Mr. Rogers, when she saw him, would supply the answer. She followed Mrs. Rogers into the house with a new interest in her, not as a mere provider of board and room, but as a human being swayed by motives and impulses hidden and mysterious to those whose lives brushed hers in passing.

## CHAPTER III

When Marilla had done some of her unpacking and had arranged her pictures on the bureau, her books on the table, and her sewing bag by the window, the room had begun to take on for her the look of home. She could turn her eyes from the high varnish of the furniture and the strange botany of the wall paper, to fix them on the lovely out-of-doors. The curtains were slipped to one side, the shades pushed as high as they would go, and through the open windows came the sweet, sun-drenched air of the afternoon. Like a picture framed in the window casing was the ever-changing beauty of the clouds floating across the blue sky, and of the shadow-patterned mountains lifting themselves above the tranquil valley.

Marilla, to whom mountains even of the modest variety known to New Hampshire were strange, hung at the window entranced. She made hasty excursions from its silent offerings to hang dresses in the wardrobe and lay underclothes in the bureau drawers, but she hurried back again to look at the rich colors and varied forms like one long starved for such beauty. She suddenly closed her trunk cover with an air of decision.

"I 'll save the rest for a rainy day," she said to herself. "I 'm sure these mountains want to know me as much as I want to know them."

She hurried out of the door with a word to Mrs. Rogers, and walked down the road, her face turned to the east where the highest mountains lay. Mrs. Rogers noticed with disapproval that she wore no hat. This seemed to her unbecoming in a school-teacher, but she said to herself with a sigh that things were not what they were when she was young.

Marilla walked with a vigorous swing along the country road. The surface was well graveled and hard, but

without a darkening coat of oil. The wind whipped up a little dust now and then, and the weeds and grasses along the side of the way carried a delicate frosting of gray. Marilla glanced about, feeling the intimate charm of the flowers and trees familiar to her from childhood, but more and more held by the beauty of the mountains which dominated the landscape.

Her absorption deepened as she caught the richness of passing shadows upon their sides and the luminous change wrought by the returning sunlight. The serrated top of a near-by height, dark from base to summit with a forest of pine, was black against the sky one moment and velvety green the next. There were dashes of yellow here and there where an early-changing birch flung its banner of brightness to the autumn sky. She caught her breath with an intensity of joy such as she had not felt since her father's death. She thought of him with a tenderness in which for the moment there was none of the haunting loneliness his memory usually evoked. No one except herself knew what a heart of gayety had been prisoned with her melancholy all those years beneath the leaky roof. But here at last she was going to be happy. She had locked the sorrows of her youth in the shabby farmhouse in Fairfield. She was free. She need no longer be stern with her happier self, no longer repress and deny her impulses in the hard name of duty. The spirit of joy was flooding her with the consciousness of her reviving youth. Forgetful of everything but the inner brightness, she walked rapidly along the road, her hair blown by the wind, her eyes shining with happiness.

She was recalled to herself by a little voice behind her, which suddenly asked, "Are you de teacher?"

Startled, Marilla turned and saw that she had been passing in front of a farm which she had barely noticed because her eyes were following the mountains at her

right. A little boy stood in front of the house, holding a younger child in his arms. His square face was deeply tanned and his blue eyes looked startlingly light by contrast. His fair hair had been clipped short by an inexpert hand and hung in straight strings over his forehead. He was barefooted and his clothes were ragged; the plump baby in his arms was smiling and clean.

Marilla smiled in response and walked toward the two children.

"Yes, I 'm the teacher. Are you going to be a pupil of mine?"

The boy nodded without change of expression.

"What 's your name?" asked Marilla.

"I 'm Piotr Topolski, and dis is my brudder, Wiktor," said the child. The baby hid his face in Piotr's neck when his name was spoken, and allowed only one blue eye to show while he was trying to decide whether this strange woman was friend or foe.

"So you are Polish children!" exclaimed Marilla in surprise. "I thought Polish people were dark with black hair and eyes."

The little boy made no reply, but kept his eyes fixed on her face as though memorizing every feature.

Marilla looked at him with equal fixedness. If this was what a Pole looked like, she was glad to have Polish children to teach. She thought that her impressions of the Polish nation must have been chiefly acquired from a youthful reading of *Thaddeus of Warsaw.* Probably romantic youth demands that a tragic figure be dark. Certainly in her imagination's portrait gallery of fame only Othello had darker eyes and hair than the heroic Thaddeus.

These attractive little children, except for their broad faces and short stature, seemed to her like any other healthy young Americans. Perhaps she had better wait

until she saw them in school before she finally made up her mind. Mrs. Rogers must surely have some reason other than prejudice for thinking so badly of them.

"I am going to the schoolhouse. Won't you come and show me the way, Piotr?" she asked. The boy's eyes were still fixed on her face in an unwinking stare.

"I 'll ask my mudder take the baby," he answered, starting toward the side door of the house. Marilla went with him, and saw a pleasant-faced woman, with her light brown hair tied up in a cloth, standing at the door. She wore a blue dress, pale with many washings, and was barefooted like the boy. Her sleeves were rolled above her elbows, and her arms were wet with soapy water. She nodded and smiled at Marilla, as the boy said something to her, rapidly, in Polish.

"Me glad see teacher," she said. Then extending her hands as if in apology, she added, "Me clean floor. All time dirt."

Marilla smiled, thinking to herself that if the spirits of former dwellers revisited their home, invaded by the foreigner, the soapy water on the kitchen floor would look familiar. Mrs. Topolski took the baby from Piotr and put him on a chair by the window.

"You 're busy. You need Piotr to help you," exclaimed Marilla in apology. "I can go to the school alone."

But Mrs. Topolski still smiled and waved them away, watching them from the door till they were out of sight round the house.

Piotr did not speak except to answer questions briefly, but Marilla watched the squat figure beside her with a quick stirring of interest. How strange that Poland, land of tragic disruption and suffering, should be parent to this plump, sturdy little boy, walking placid and untroubled through the peaceful New England scenery.

The one-room white schoolhouse was surrounded by trees which promised a cool shade in the spring and fall and whose bare branches would admit the sunshine during the cold months of the year. Windows on three sides supplied ample light and air, and a big stove in the back of the room showed the source of heat for the winter. Through the windows, Marilla could see bookcases filled with books, hanging maps on the walls, and a stand of reading charts in the corner. She felt sure that Mr. Osburn had been able to keep his promise to make this better than the ordinary country school by providing ample material with which to teach. She had learned, through bitter experience, that modern education requires more than a teacher on one end of a log and a pupil on the other. The subjects that must be taught, rapidly and accurately, to a twentieth-century child have become too complicated for so simple a method. With all the aids modern educational ingenuity could devise, Marilla felt the task was beyond the ability of many teachers, certainly beyond her own. Mr. Osburn had asked her to come to Lovell because he knew she wanted to do better teaching, and he had assured her that with his larger budget he could let her try out her ideas under favorable conditions.

Marilla looked at Piotr with shining eyes. What a challenge to try to give this child of ancient peasant background the findings of a modern civilization! Would he take it or reject it? She looked at his stolid figure and unchanging face. He surely had capacity to resist whatever did not appeal to him. She wished she knew more of the racial culture that lay behind him and his mates.

When they reached the Topolskis' on their return, Piotr was replying to Marilla's questions with a little more freedom, though he spoke slowly as one to whom English is still almost a foreign tongue. Mrs. Topolski was

waiting for them on the porch, holding in her hands a great bunch of cosmos, which she had picked from the mass growing in the front dooryard. As Marilla drew near, she held up the flowers, her face wreathed in smiles, and said, "For Piotr's teacher."

Marilla took the bouquet with a smiling word of thanks and asked who had planted the flowers by the door. The boy answered for his mother, who turned to him puzzled at Marilla's question. He explained that the plants were there when they came to the house, and his mother had not dug them up because she loved flowers.

"My mudder ask my fadder leave flowers. He no like them. He like potatoes and hay. He cut down all trees. Keep sun away."

Glancing about, Marilla saw that the tall elms which so often rim the clearings in New Hampshire or stand like slender, graceful guardians in the hay fields were absent from the Topolski place. In their stead were raw-looking stumps, set in circles of darkening chips. Save for the two great elms on either side of the doorstep, probably planted there by the men who had hewn the original timbers of the house, the place was stripped bare. Marilla felt a pang. Was it possible that the two remaining trees were being reserved for a later cutting? The first thing she would teach her young Polish-Americans would be a love for the beautiful things of nature, not just for their food or fuel value, but for their native loveliness.

She pointed to the elms and said to the child, "Tell your mother not to cut these trees."

The boy spoke to his mother in Polish and she answered him, speaking rapidly, with many gesticulations toward the trees and toward Marilla.

Piotr translated, "She say keep trees for lightning."

He pointed to a long gash on the side of the taller tree, where a great strip of bark had been ripped off. "Den no strike house."

Marilla smiled. She was glad the lightning could work for her until she had had time to develop an æsthetic enthusiasm in her Polish pupils. She nodded to Mrs. Topolski in approval, and Mrs. Topolski nodded a pleased response.

"Was Piotr born in this country?" Marilla asked.

"Ya, in Lovell, near factory," answered the mother, happy to understand the question.

"What part of Poland do you come from?" asked Marilla, trying to visualize in memory the boundaries of the new Poland created by the World War.

Mrs. Topolski spoke eagerly. "I come from Zolkiew. All Poles in Lovell from Galicia. You come in house. I show you picture. Very nice country. My fadder, mudder, live dere now."

Marilla followed her into the kitchen. The floor had been scoured clean and was almost dry. The baby was still sitting in the chair, chewing on a crust of dark bread. Mrs. Topolski led Marilla into the front parlor, as much the room of state under her care as in the day of its New England owners. The furniture it contained lacked the beauty and dignity of the rush-bottomed chairs, and the gate-legged tables of an earlier time, but what there was represented an aspiration which Marilla was able to recognize and respect. The green plush sofa and the cheap imitation-mahogany table and chairs, standing stiffly against the paneled wainscoting of the room, looked out of place, but Marilla could guess that their glaring beauties made the Topolskis' one of the show parlors in the Polish colony.

Mrs. Topolski pulled a box of photographs from the lower shelf of the table and searched through them for

the one she wished to show the teacher. Meanwhile Marilla's eyes roved over the room.

On a shelf in the corner, flanked with vases of paper flowers, was a colored plaster figure of one of the saints. Marilla gasped a little as she thought of the stern men and women of a narrow Protestant faith who had paneled this room and shuttered the windows in the years gone by. What would they say if they knew that the spiritual children of Rome were under the protection of their roof? They would find it hard, she thought, in spite of hereditary prejudice, to associate evil with the sweet-faced woman, all smiles and eager friendliness, who ushered her in.

On the wall were two framed pictures, one of the Pope in his pontifical robes, the other of a man about thirty-five years of age, smooth shaven, with the keen face and alert expression characteristic of the best type of New Englander.

"Who is that?" Marilla asked, instantly attracted, pointing to the picture.

Mrs. Topolski looked up from her sorting. "Mr. Walton. He run de mill in Lovell." Mrs. Topolski smiled. "He very good man. He help us buy de farm. He friend all Polish people. I work for him."

"Did you work in the mill?" Marilla asked, surprised.

"Yes, all time till two babies. Now, too much work on farm. Bimeby, when Wiktor bigger boy, I go back."

"Oh, no," protested Marilla. "You must stay at home. Who will take care of the children while you are gone?"

"Dey all right," smiled Mrs. Topolski. "I make big money, more money dan my husband. I work queek. Bimeby we buy nudder farm. Have plenty land."

Marilla gave up asking questions. She felt she had much to learn before she could understand people who

possessed a hunger for ownership of more rocky New Hampshire hillsides. She looked with interest at the pictures of Mrs. Topolski's relatives in Poland, dressed in their pretty embroidered costumes and wearing the solemn expressions of those going through an ordeal. Facing the camera was evidently not a common experience with the Polish Topolskis. She learned the name of the village in Galicia where Mr. Topolski was born, and something about the new Poland that had been created from the broken pieces of the old. Mrs. Topolski seemed pleased at Marilla's interest. She had to get Piotr's help to explain that his uncles at home were forced to serve to-day in the Polish army as their father had been in the Austrian.

"Very bad," she said. "All young men must be soldiers. 'Merica good country. Man can work all time on farm."

She smiled happily as she bade Marilla good-bye.

"In Poland," she said, "only rich man have farm like dis. My husband and me, we goin' to be very rich 'Mericans."

Marilla felt a stirring of admiration. Any people who could dream of wresting wealth, and what wealth means of leisure and opportunity, from this New Hampshire of meagre foliage masking a gray skeleton of rocks were to be treated with respect. What if they did express their hopes in terms of material wealth? They might boast of more cabbages and heavier hay, of a bigger crop of corn, fatter pigs and richer cream, but these were not ends in themselves. Their use would bring shoes to Mrs. Topolski, a secondhand car to Mr. Topolski, a victrola to the parlor, and a good education to Piotr and Wiktor, with all that such possessions would mean in the enlargement and enrichment of life.

That evening Marilla had only a brief glimpse of Mr.

Rogers when he returned at eight o'clock. If she had looked for the hero of an elderly romance, she was disappointed. He was a large, bony man who moved awkwardly inside his clothes as if his long arms and legs were but imperfectly jointed and threatening to break away. He was visibly under the domination of Mrs. Rogers and obeyed her quick suggestions as to where to put his hat and which chair to take as if he had no will of his own. When he was finally seated with the kitchen lamp in front of him, eating the food Mrs. Rogers had set out, Marilla was able to look more closely at his deeply wrinkled face, brown with burn from the sun and dark with a week's growth of beard. There was a slow kindliness in his expression which attracted her. He said little and was busy with his food during the time she stayed in the kitchen, but just as she was starting to her room he put down the heaping spoonful of cold baked beans which was halfway to his mouth and gave her a friendly smile.

"Emma 'n' I ain't very excitin' folks to live with, but we kinda hanker to have a young lady like you around. We 're more than pleased you 're goin' to be with us this winter."

She went to her room and to bed feeling suddenly warmed and comforted. She knew she would enjoy Mr. Rogers and she was certain that Mrs. Rogers, under her frosty exterior, must have caught a little fire from years of living with such a pleasant and cordial companion as her husband. As she closed her eyes Marilla sleepily assured herself that when she had once penetrated the defensive mask between herself and her landlady she would like her and find her a friend.

## CHAPTER IV

At half-past eight the next morning Marilla heard the unmistakable sound of Mr. Osburn's car at the side door. She was ready and came out at once. The day was warm and still, inviting to leisure, but Marilla's every movement was brisk and energetic. Her cool brown dress, trimmed with white collar and cuffs, seemed appropriate both to the season and to her mood.

Mr. Osburn looked at her with approval. To his mind she was the perfect teacher, eager and enthusiastic, yet with a quiet dignity and poise which gave her control without effort over the most unruly children. He was less able to evaluate the unusual fineness of her face, which bore the stamp of generations of men and women who had remained faithful, under arduous and depressing conditions, to inherited spiritual and moral ideals, but his admiration for her ability was whole-hearted and he was ready to give her every help he could.

When they reached the school they found the Onski girl, who was janitress as well as oldest pupil, standing by the door with the key clutched in her hand. With her mother's help, she had swept and cleaned the building, and was now engaged in keeping the children from entering until the superintendent should arrive. The pupils had come early, lunches under their arms, in order to miss none of the excitement of the opening day. They knew by instinct how much of their joy or unhappiness during the coming year would depend upon the character of the young woman sitting in the front seat of Mr. Osburn's car.

"This is Miss Lamprey, your new teacher," Mr. Osburn said to the silent waiting group as he stopped the car in their midst and jumped to the ground.

Marilla stood for a moment on the running board,

looking from one face to another and smiling at the circle of children. Jan Dybiec, who was fifteen and only waiting for an opening in the mill to leave school, felt a warm glow around his ears when she turned her eyes in his direction. His thoughts were in a sudden tumult. It would not be so bad after all if the mill should lay off workers this winter instead of taking them on!

"And this is your faithful janitress, Hedwig Onski," Mr. Osburn added as he pointed out the sober child to Marilla. The Polish girls in Lovell had been unable to keep the feminine ending to their surnames in a school system which was intellectually unequipped to recognize such a distinction, and Hedwig's pretty "Onska" had been sacrificed with the rest. She smiled shyly at Marilla's greeting, and then turned quickly to unlock the doors of the building.

The girls followed Mr. Osburn and Marilla through the right of the two doors and the boys went in through the left. They put caps and lunches on a shelf in the entry and slipped quickly into their seats, where they could be in a position to notice all that the new teacher did and said. From their observations to-day they would be able to forecast the fortune of the year. They had done what they chose with the timid teacher of the year before who paled and flushed in response to their mocking or impertinent looks. They had whispered, they had shuffled their feet noisily on the floor, they had run to the window to watch honking automobiles or leisurely ox-teams go by, they had stood silent when asked to recite, and had laughed uproariously when the more docile pupils showed a disposition to obey. They would not soon forget how the rough Zabka girl, Ewa, when threatened with punishment for her continued defiance, had slapped the teacher in the face. Most of them had been shocked by that and were pleased when the superintendent, the

next day, expelled Ewa from school for the rest of the term. But Ewa had only laughed and been glad. After she got over the terrible beating her father gave her, she used to hide from her mother in the mornings and run down the road to make faces at the children as they went by on their way to school and to jeer at them for going.

Ewa was back at school to-day and the children's eyes turned from her to Marilla, wondering uneasily what would happen when the superintendent had gone and left the teacher alone with her. The girl's hair was in a tangle and her face dirty. Ewa was not dependent on words to show disrespect; she was mistress of many methods.

"She 'll be your chief problem," Mr. Osburn had said to Marilla. "She kept the whole school in turmoil until I expelled her. If someone should ask the other pupils how they enjoyed last year, I suppose they 'd say they had a great time following Ewa's lead and baiting the teacher, but a more unhappy and discontented lot of children I never saw. They won't know why they 're quiet and happy with you, but they 'll find that for some reason they suddenly like school. No black Mondays for them this year; not even pale gray ones," he added with a laugh.

It did not take him long to show Marilla the different supplies stored in the closet and the big cupboard, and with Jan's help to bring the new books and blocks of paper from the car. He handed her the last year's school register, and put on the desk a typewritten copy of the programme of studies, with a short outline of the amount of work she would be expected to cover during the year. Marilla was too experienced a teacher to need more detailed direction. In any case much must be left to her judgment and ingenuity, and Mr. Osburn was confident she would better his instructions. He made a few brief

remarks to the children, who sat quietly at their desks watching his every motion, and then departed, drawing a deep breath of relief as he drove away. The year before that school had been his greatest anxiety. It seemed to him that half his time had been spent trying to console and encourage the despairing young teacher, and the other half endeavoring to help her by means of words to a wisdom which could only come as the fruit of experience.

Marilla went back to her desk after Mr. Osburn had gone. She stood a moment looking at the children with a smile which they could instantly see was both fearless and friendly. They remembered that the young teacher of the year before had seldom looked them straight in the face, and they waited in silence to hear what this one had to say. Several of the boys and girls had been brought up in homes where blows took the place of words, and they did not forget to watch as well as listen.

Marilla neither rang the desk bell at her hand nor made any formal call to order. Instead, she quietly opened the Bible and conducted the morning exercises, sitting at her desk as unassumingly as though she were one of them. When she was through, she walked over to a table by the door and picked up a branch of maple, brilliant with the autumn coloring, which she had brought with her that morning. She held the glowing mass of leaves before the children and began to talk about the mystery of the autumn change and of the varying colors in trees of different varieties. She questioned the older pupils as to what trees they knew, and how they recognized them in the four seasons. She found out how many different hues they could pick out and name, and with how many shapes of foliage they were familiar. She drew hasty outlines of leaves on the board and let the children in turn write beneath them the names of the trees from which they came, specially praising shy Jane Smith, who was con-

scious of being backward in arithmetic but made not a single failure in identifying the trees from the shape of their leaves.

While she talked and questioned, Marilla was watching her pupils. She recognized the refined little Hilton children by their New England accent, and the Burbank boy by his vacant expression and heavy eyes. One large girl, wedged in a back seat too small for her, whose pretty coloring and regular features attracted her attention, she decided must be the Ruby Fox of whom the superintendent had spoken to her. The girl, who had been in school for ten years without getting beyond the fourth grade, was shortly to celebrate her sixteenth birthday by leaving school entirely. Marilla would hardly know her before she would be gone. She looked at the expressionless face with a great pity, not alone for the girl herself, who sat quiet and untroubled among the others, but for the parents to whom such a child mind in a mature body must mean heartache and lifelong disappointment.

By the character of their speech she decided the rest of the children must be Polish. The names of most of them were in the register of the previous year, but Marilla called three new pupils to the desk to be graded and assigned to their permanent seats. When she questioned them, she found that they were all members of one family, Helena Pilat and her two younger brothers. Helena told her that their father had come from Massachusetts in May and had bought a deserted farm on the hills behind the school. Marilla looked in vain for the children's names in the school register of the preceding spring term. They had all evidently managed to evade the compulsory-school law during their first weeks in Lovell. She could imagine the struggle they had had to make the old barn and house on the hill tight against the weather, to plough and fertilize the overgrown fields, and to plant all the

corn and potatoes, cabbage and onions the harrowed land would hold, but of course that did not excuse the father's defiance of the law and neglect of his duty to his children. She said to Helena, rebukingly, "You should have come to school in the spring, as soon as you moved to Lovell. Did n't your father know that?" She wrote their names in the book as she waited for the answer.

"My fadda know. He make us work. Too busy for school," answered Helena finally, twisting the end of her yellow braid in embarrassment as she stood before the desk.

"Are n't you too busy for school now, too?" said Marilla, looking up with a sudden smile of reassurance for the sweet-faced girl, whose figure at fourteen was almost that of a grown woman.

Helena gave a timid smile in return.

"My fadda don't want me to go to school. He say he need me to put new roof on house. But Mr. Walton tell him I must go to school. I must be American girl now. If my fadda don't send me to school, Mr. Walton say no job in mill for my fadda. So I go to school."

Before Marilla's eyes flashed the face she had seen in the picture on the Topolskis' wall. The mill owner who, so Mrs. Rogers said, had offered work in Lovell to the Poles from the steel mills and the mines, the man who was such a good friend to Polish people! A friend to Polish children, too! Did Helena's father think as well of him as did Mrs. Topolski? He might not be very grateful to a man who made him send his best worker to school during the working hours of the day. Helena, however, seemed content. As Marilla looked at the child's smiling face, her interest in the unknown man who befriended these strangers in the land was quickened. Perhaps some day she would meet him and could tell

him what they said of him in their broken English.

The register was soon completed and Marilla faced the roomful of children, grouped carefully according to grades, with their books, papers, and pencils neatly arranged in their desks. She had the happy look of the teacher who both loves her work and knows through experience her ability to do it well. As her eyes traveled from face to face, noting the eager and timid, the clouded and the alert, she felt drawn to them all. If she could only be wise enough to give to each child according to his needs! She pledged herself to do her utmost. If she failed, it should not be at any rate for lack of trying.

Fortunately for her and for them, it was long since she had had to consider the question of discipline. She remembered an old teacher of hers at the normal school, who had said, "Do all your disciplining the first week of teaching. At the end of five days the matter is inevitably settled one way or the other for the whole of the school year, so you can't afford to waste a moment."

Marilla would never forget her first anxious week of teaching, nor her tremulous joy as she gradually realized that the teacher's gift was hers, and that the children, for reasons as mysterious to herself as to them, were accepting her authority gladly and without question. From that moment she had been able to forget the very thought of restriction. The effect of her personality upon the children was control enough; all her attention could be concentrated upon the training and development of their minds.

She started the classes at their work, the older children reviewing their arithmetic and the younger practising the use of some ingenious new material designed to help beginners in reading. An ungraded school, to many teachers, represents everything that is most difficult and disappointing in educational work. To Marilla it seemed to

offer unique opportunity to meet the individual needs of each pupil. The more gifted children could advance rapidly, with the minimum of guidance from her, the less gifted could adjust their pace to their ability, and all could learn by observing and emulating one another.

The climbing sun poured radiantly into the room where the children were quietly at work within an hour of the opening of school. Marilla moved from desk to desk, observing and guiding the efforts of the pupils. She was bending over the desk to show the little Hilton boy how to use his box of letters, when he suddenly pulled a toy watch from his pocket, and said shyly, holding it up for her to see, "I got a clock."

Some of the children near by looked up and smiled. Ewa, who sat behind him, burst into loud laughter. Marilla instantly turned to her.

"Tell him what he should have said, Ewa."

Ewa was a little taken aback by the suddenness of the question, but she answered, still giggling, "It 's a watch, not a clock."

"What 's the difference?" pursued Marilla, quickly.

Ewa hesitated a moment. All the children were listening to her now.

"One you hang on you," she answered, stumblingly. "De odder goes off in de morning."

The other children were ready to laugh at that, but Marilla made no comment, continuing to ask questions of Ewa until she got an answer that satisfied her. Then she turned quickly to something else. But meanwhile she had observed many things. The control of Ewa would not be beyond her powers. The girl was not stupid, only lawless and undisciplined. She had evidently alienated whatever friends she had among the children and it was clear that none of them would join her in mutiny. The thought of Ewa's possible rebellion could be dis-

missed. But Marilla was deeply impressed with the need she in common with the other children showed, not so much for discipline, as for special training in English speech. Their accent betrayed their Polish ancestry to the most casual observer. She did not wish them to conceal or be ashamed of their Polish origin, but they must learn to speak accurately and well the language of their adopted land, instead of a strange dialect which was certain to prove as separating as a physical frontier between them and their fellow citizens.

She found by questioning Hedwig that the Polish language had no *th* sound, and part of her first day of teaching was spent in trying to put the hard labial into the speech and consciousness of the children to whom it was strange and difficult. The native Americans listened with such a superior air that she asked Jan to give them, in turn, a Polish word to pronounce, and thereby produced a humbling confusion among them.

At recess Marilla went outdoors with the children and started them to playing games under the pine trees. When they were all busily engaged, she seated herself on the ground, leaning against the trunk of a tree, and watched them. Two or three of the little children came up to her shyly now and then and stood beside her for a moment before returning to their games. She smiled at them and they smiled back without speaking. She noticed that they generally talked English to each other, even when Polish child spoke to Polish, except when, occasionally, in the excitement of a game, a few Polish words slipped out unawares. She listened eagerly when that happened. To her unaccustomed ear the language had a harsh sound. The unfamiliar inflections, combined with gesticulations and a vehemence of manner strange to her, made her feel as if the Polish children were in continual quarrel with one another. But their laughter

and cheerful faces reassured her, and she quickly ceased to expect blows to follow Slavic words. She turned now and then to look at the old schoolhouse, thinking of the generations, long dead and gone, of young Morrisons and Rogerses, Davises and Hunts, who must have been educated there and sent out to do important service for the Republic of their day. What would they think if they could come back and see these strangers in possession under the trees which they themselves had climbed and hear them shouting to each other in a language which they had never heard and could not understand?

Ewa was standing apart for a moment, and Marilla beckoned to her. She came slowly, eyeing Marilla as a wild creature might watch some suspicious feature of the landscape. Marilla smiled in a friendly way and motioned the girl to sit beside her. Ewa dropped to the ground in an untidy heap.

"I have been noticing what lovely hair you have," said Marilla. "It seems too bad not to fix it in a pretty way. Have you ever tried doing it up in a knot at your neck?"

Ewa looked at her open-mouthed. She had lifted her hand automatically to her tangled tresses when Marilla spoke.

"Is it pretty?" she asked, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"Yes, very," answered Marilla, "and your skin is pretty, too. You must have been out in the sun a good deal to get it such a rich color. But it is not quite clean. No girl who cares how she looks ever lets her face get dirty."

Ewa rubbed her hand across her cheek, as if to remove the obscuring dirt, but her eyes did not leave Marilla's face and her look of bewilderment only deepened.

"Every day after this before you start to school, I want you to wash your face carefully," said Marilla.

"When visitors come I want to be proud of my pretty pupils. I want to say, 'Look at Ewa! Is n't she a nice-looking girl?' Can you come home with me after school to-day and let me show you how to fix your hair?"

Ewa, staring at her, nodded for answer, but she had no words. She always thought of a teacher as an enemy, though her heart was softening unaccountably toward this one. She had never in her life thought or cared how she looked. Was she really pretty after all? Was it possible that she might learn to fix her hair as nicely as Miss Lamprey's? She would go home with her and see. During the rest of the day she was too absorbed in thinking to remember her plans for making this teacher cry as she had the one the year before. She covertly watched Marilla as she passed from desk to desk, guiding the work, conducting classes, and helping individual children with their difficulties. She wondered at her voice, so low and even in tone, and noticed that the children subdued their own voices not to miss a word of what she said.

"She did n't lick nobody," said Michal Dybiec to his brother as they started home after school was dismissed. "She ain't a good teacher."

Jan turned on him in a fury. "You say that again and I 'll lick you," he shouted, and Michal, after a stare of amazement, ran toward home without reply.

But infatuated Jan, though he would allow no word of criticism from Michal, had his own secret doubts. Could she be a good teacher when she never shouted or struck them? Perhaps she was just fooling them by her gentle ways and was planning worse things than lickings. He, for one, would take no chances. What she told him to do, he would do, and be safe.

When school was over, Ewa walked home with Marilla, while the other children followed the two with

wondering and apprehensive eyes. What was the teacher going to do to Ewa, the bad girl of the school? They were glad they were not in her place.

Marilla questioned Ewa as they walked along. She found the girl was born in Poland and had come to America when she was a baby.

"We are both strangers here in Lovell," Marilla said pleasantly. "You have been here longer than I have. You must help me to feel at home."

Ewa's sullen look melted into an unexpected smile.

"Yes, I help you," she answered. "I show you places where pretty flowers grow. I know birds' nests and I get you eggs next summer."

Marilla saw ahead of her a special task of protecting the song birds from unthinking young marauders, but she would not worry about that until spring. For the present she could enjoy Ewa's enthusiasm. The two talked about flowers till they turned into the Rogers' yard. Marilla secretly hoped Mrs. Rogers would not be at home, for she felt sure Ewa would not be welcome in the spotless house.

Marilla opened the screen door and invited Ewa to enter. The girl, embarrassed, wiped her bare feet vigorously on the rag rug at the door before she stepped into the kitchen. Mrs. Rogers was standing by the table, grating green corn for fritters, the kitchen and herself shining with cleanliness. She looked at Ewa askance, but Marilla said quickly, "Ewa is coming into my room for a few minutes. I want to show her a pretty way to fix her hair."

Mrs. Rogers' expression of disapproval grew more intense, but her only remark was, "Supper at five to-night. Mr. Rogers must haul a bag of oats for Mr. Hilton after he 's through eating."

Marilla led Ewa into her room and made her sit down

in front of the mirror which hung above the low bureau. A quick inspection assured her that the girl's head was clean though her face was dirty. She handed her a comb and told her to get out the snarls.

Ewa combed and tugged obediently, closing her eyes with an expression of anguish as she tore out the hair in her efforts to remove particularly obstinate tangles. Marilla found a paper of hairpins in a drawer, and laid it on the white cover of the bureau.

"In the big cities some of the girls are cutting their hair short," she said. "You would n't have such snarls if you did that."

Ewa stopped her combing for a moment, and looked up at her with an expression of amazement.

"No, I not cut my hair. I 'm lady, not man."

"Oh, well," said Marilla, soothingly, "you don't need to. I 'll show you how to take care of your hair so it won't get tangled."

When the combing was finished to Marilla's taste, she arranged Ewa's hair, which though straight was soft and fine, in a coil at the base of the girl's neck and fastened it securely with the hair pins. Then she made Ewa inspect it in the mirror and gave her a hand glass so that she could view the new arrangement from every angle. Suddenly Ewa put down the glass and said, —

"I wash my face, too."

Marilla assented, trying not to show too much approval, and led the way to the washstand. She poured some water in the basin, put soap, washcloth, and a towel beside it, and stood back to watch Ewa's performance. The girl attacked the task with just such energy as she might have applied to the scrubbing of a floor. She splashed and rubbed and polished. When she finally ended her strenuous labors, with hair damp and skin a bright red, the washcloth and towel were grimed, the

washstand looked as if it had figured in a flood, but Ewa was transformed. Marilla exclaimed at her appearance, praised her efficiency, told her she could help her keep the little children in the school clean, and urged her again to look in the mirror and observe the change. When the smiling girl had admired herself sufficiently and was ready to go, Marilla put the package of hairpins in her hand and then held out the little hand glass.

"These are for you to keep," she said. "Now you can look in the glass every morning and see whether you are ready for school."

The girl took the gifts from Marilla and held them with a covetous grasp. Her words of thanks were halting and incoherent, but her face was radiant, and as she slipped out of the kitchen door she seemed for once unconscious of the disapproving look which Mrs. Rogers bestowed upon her.

Marilla went with her to the porch and waved a smiling good-bye. When she stepped back into the kitchen, Mrs. Rogers spoke warningly.

"Those Zabkas are the worst Polanders round here," she said, as she finished scraping the last milky ear of corn and gathered the husks and ears into a pan to be taken to the pig pen. "I would n't waste any time on that girl. Her father knows what to do with her. He beats her well and he does it often. Nothing else learns a girl like that."

"Well," answered Marilla, undisturbed, "I don't think his success has been very noticeable. I 'm going to try something else. I must say I was a little frightened to find how easily she rose to my bait. I thought I could appeal to a girl's natural pride in her appearance, but what I found looks like vanity. She gets hard knocks at home. Perhaps that will keep her sufficiently subdued so that I shan't ruin her utterly. But did you notice

how pretty she looked after she was clean and decent? With some good clothes she 'd be a beauty!"

"I don't set much store by the Polanders' looks, myself," said Mrs. Rogers, picking up the pan and starting for the door. "They 're too round and plump-looking, and all the girls, even that fourteen-year-old Ewa, have their eyes out for the boys. I prefer a ladylike girl that 's kind of spare and keeps herself to herself."

The screen door closed behind her with a sharp snap and the papers along its edge fluttered and shivered for a moment before they drooped once more. The flies, clinging tenaciously to the wire, waiting their chance to follow the savory kitchen odor to its source, circled and buzzed distractedly after the interruption of their quiet, then one by one lighted again and returned to their task of patient waiting.

Marilla went back to her room to wash her comb, change her towel and bureau cover, and clean the spattered washstand, mottled in splotches of black with the soil which had been gathered by the daughter of the Polish Zabkas from the rocky surface of New Hampshire.

## CHAPTER V

One day the last of September, Mr. Osburn said to Marilla as he was leaving after a short visit at the school, "Would you care to go with Mrs. Osburn and me to an auction at the Stickney farm on Wild Cat Mountain, Saturday? Old place up there with all its furniture is going to be sold. Mrs. Osburn wants to buy some chairs, and I thought maybe you 'd like to go along. It 's pretty country, and the colors are beginning to be brilliant."

Marilla assented eagerly. Every day after school she took long, happy walks over the hills, but the automobile would extend the range of her acquaintance with this varied and lovely country.

Early Saturday morning the car stopped for her. Mrs. Osburn, a large-featured, sallow woman with a dissatisfied expression and a restless manner, sat in the back seat with her dog, a black-and-white fox terrior that barked vigorously at everybody and everything. He greeted Marilla with a ferocity which his small size belied, but not until Mrs. Osburn had gathered him in her arms and held him tight did Marilla venture to get into the seat beside her.

"He 's such a wonderful watch dog," explained Mrs. Osburn as they started off. "He won't let anyone come near the house. He does n't do anything except bark at grown people, but he bites children. I have to scold him about it all the time. It 's lucky we have n't any children of our own, or we might have to get rid of him." She cuddled him tenderly as she spoke.

Marilla tried to make friends with the dog, but, though he allowed her to pat him, he kept a suspicious eye upon her while she did so. After enduring her attentions for a time, he jumped into the front seat and sat erect beside

Mr. Osburn, with his eye on the road, ready to spring to the offensive at the first opportunity.

Just beyond the schoolhouse the road turned up the mountain and began to climb abruptly. Marilla was full of delight in the rapidly widening view. The valley of the Little River was soon left behind and more distant mountains rose into place on the horizon. The foliage was everywhere flaming with the autumn tints. Beside the road as they moved along, richly colored wayside weeds and grasses looked like strips of Persian carpet endlessly unrolling in intricate patterns of red and orange and brown. The maples splashed the hillsides with red, and the yellow birches had the brilliance and sparkle of flame. The dark pines, in great masses on the higher slopes or clustered here and there in the hardwood forests lower down, were as intense as black in the general riot of color. They seemed, by their solidity, to hold to earth a rapture of beauty which challenged the heavens.

On some of the steeper grades Mr. Osburn began to have difficulty with the car. The steam escaped from the radiator in clouds, and the dog crouched, ready to spring at this new enemy. Suddenly the car stopped of itself.

"We 'll have to wait for the engine to cool," observed Mr. Osburn, calmly. He pulled up the emergency brake and leaned back comfortably, one hand resting on the back of the seat, the other tweaking the ears of the watchful dog.

"You might get water from the brook and cool the engine more quickly," suggested Mrs. Osburn, long experienced in hill climbing. "I brought the tomato can along."

She handed her husband a round tin, pinched a little on one side to facilitate pouring. He took it from her and made a move to push the dog aside and step out.

"Let me get the water," said Marilla, eagerly, holding out her hand for the can. "I 'd love to."

She jumped out and ran down a little wooded slope to the brook, which wound its rapid way among the boulders of its bed and gathered here and there into little pools of shadowed water. Marilla dipped the can in a dark eddy which was so quietly filled by the main stream that the reflections of the ferns at its edge lay flat and clear on the shining surface.

When she returned, holding the dripping tin in her hand, Mr. Osburn had the cap of the radiator partly unscrewed, ready to lift it off at a moment's notice. He cautiously made the final turn and jumped back out of range when the first jet of steaming water leaped from its confinement. He listened appraisingly to the subsiding rumbles, and tried to peer into the depths to see how much water had boiled away before he emptied the contents of the can. The cold water seemed to effect a prompt cure, the bubbling sounds ceased, and no more steam escaped. Mr. Osburn screwed the cap in place again with quick interrupted motions, designed to protect his fingers from long contact with the hot metal, and then stepped back into the car. Marilla had already taken her seat by Mrs. Osburn, and they promptly started up the mountain road once more.

A big automobile with a man and a woman sitting on the front seat quietly slipped by them as they toiled slowly and noisily upward.

"That 's Mr. Walton, owner of the Lovell mill," explained Mr. Osburn to Marilla as he waved his hand to the driver. He had to shout in order to make himself heard above the sound of the straining engine.

Marilla's eyes followed the rapidly climbing automobile with sudden attention. "I hear about him constantly from the school children," she said. "He seems to be

much interested in the Polish people." The car ahead went easily over the top of the rise and out of sight.

"Good fellow, but kind of queer," said Mr. Osburn, retarding the spark in an effort to help his car make the grade. "Keeps to himself and minds his owr business."

"Is that his wife with him?" asked Marilla.

Mrs. Osburn looked much amused.

"No, he won't have anything to do with women. Afraid of 'em." She laughed a little. "They say he 's never looked at one in his life. He 's a real old bachelor. That 's his sister. She 's the Lovell visiting nurse. After the flu epidemic that came the last year of the War the town decided it ought to have a nurse. Amelia Walton was over in France in a hospital at the time, taking care of the soldiers, but when she got back they offered her the position, and she 's had it ever since. She keeps house for her brother. They live in that old-fashioned white house on the street above the mill. You 'd think, with all his money, he 'd build a modern house with some style, but he 's the kind that likes what he 's always had." Mrs. Osburn prided herself on being progressive and not allowing the past to smother her.

Marilla made no reply. When they were riding smoothly along a level stretch again, she observed, "I suppose Mr. Walton was n't in the War."

"Yes, he was," answered Mr. Osburn from the front seat. "He was twelve months over in France and got some kind of decoration. Never did hear just what it was, and he won't tell. He 's like a lot of those fellows that saw service at the front — does n't like to talk about it."

"Perhaps he will when he 's old and it 's all further away," observed Marilla, recalling loquacious veterans of the Civil War to whom she had listened in childhood.

"Maybe," said Mr. Osburn. "But he 's a quiet fellow and does n't talk much about anything."

As they went further up the mountain side the blanket of vegetation thinned, and the gaunt rocks showed in jutting crags save where, here and there, the foliage of a precariously rooted pine tree showed dark against the gray. The abandoned pastures, overgrown with sweet fern, were checkered with ledges like great monoliths from a giant's workshop strewn carelessly on the hillside. The rocky outcroppings were fringed with berry bushes, bright with the autumn coloring, springing up where the blown leaves had lodged and where surplus water, draining from the surface of the ledges, had made the soil a little more fertile than on surrounding slopes.

"There are lots of blueberries in these old clearings," said Mrs. Osburn. "We came up here last August and got two pailfuls without walking more than a hundred feet."

"Blueberry patches in the clearings always seem pathetic to me," said Marilla meditatively. "They grow where man has given up trying. They 're like gravestones of farms that have come to some pitiful end."

Mrs. Osburn looked at her critically. What kind of queer girl had John brought up here to teach in Lovell? Such notions about berries that make the finest pie in New England must come from a morbid mind. Probably Miss Lamprey did not like to get her teeth blue and so invented strange ideas to explain why she would n't eat the pie. Was n't that the kind of thing the Grange lecturer last winter called "overcompensation"?

Mr. Osburn was absorbed in thickening the gas mixture and had not heard what Marilla said. Mrs. Osburn made no reply, and the two women sat silent, each busy with her own thoughts.

They passed a few cellar holes of houses which, long since deserted by those whom they once sheltered, had crumbled and disappeared. The granite slabs of their

foundations were still in place, lopsided where the earth had washed away beneath them, but intact and ready again to support the sills of human habitation. In the cellars the rotting timbers had fallen crosswise in confusion. With their decay they were fertilizing slender white birches which, rooted in the old dirt floor on which the apples and potatoes of ancient harvests had lain, lifted their branches in gay abandon above the worn doorsteps and guardian lilacs of the abandoned homes.

There was an occasional deserted house still standing, with broken windowpanes and gaping holes in the roof. Marilla's first look as they went by was for the doorway. To her the old New England house revealed itself in the framing of its doors as does a friend in the lineaments and expression of his face. Here and there her eye lingered, sensing across the years the call of beauty which through arduous days had inspired some humble builder of long ago. Often it was only a line or a paneling or a proportion more than ordinarily lovely, but it betrayed the same instinct for perfection that must have animated him who moulded Peter's dome. The front doorway of the old farmhouse in Fairfield had just such an elusive touch of beauty. Marilla wondered if that remote forebear of hers, who had taken time from the labor of his fields to frame and panel the low door in lines of grace without any guidance save the unconscious instinct of the artist, lived again in her. Why, otherwise, should she feel such delight in these imperfectly realized bits of loveliness?

Round a bend in the road, they came suddenly upon a number of wagons and automobiles standing in a field at their left. The hay had clearly not been cut for several years. The grass, thin, matted at the roots and shriveled by the September sun, was dotted with late flowers, deep purple and gold, with clumps of the pallid everlasting scattered here and there. The neglected field had raised a

special crop of its own, not useful to man, but full nevertheless of vigor and beauty. The tires of the cars flattened the yellowed witch grass, but between the spokes the fall asters danced in the wind. The horses, tied to trees along the stone fence, insensitive to beauty, nosed the flowers out of their way in their search for sweet morsels of green near the roots.

Mr. Osburn left his car in line with the others, and with the two women walked across the road where they could see the old house at the end of its grass-grown driveway, flanked by ragged lilac bushes. A great square chimney, the strong support against which the whole house seemed to lean, pierced the roof at the centre. The home-made bricks, cemented with clay from some neighboring hollow, were a deep rose color, a true sunset tint, but they were loosened and toppling, and some, dislodged by wind and rain, had fallen to the ground. The shingles on the roof showed the weathering of many years and were insecurely held in place. Many were shriveled and curled, as though under the alchemy of sun and storm the tough fibre of the original wood had turned to paper. Seeing it from a distance, one might have thought that a discolored straw thatch, brought from some European peasant's home, had been used to roof an old New Hampshire farmhouse.

But Marilla's eyes did not linger on the walls or the roof; she had caught a glimpse of the doorway in the front. The whole house focused there. The shabbiness before her was not ugly dilapidation, but beauty in the midst of ruin. She might have been looking into the face of a noble old woman, whose cheeks the years had robbed of their color and whose eyes no longer shone with the lustre of youth, but the beauty of whose character came out in stronger lines when the mere surface perfections were gone.

Mrs. Osburn was walking beside Marilla, too busy trying to keep her dog from snapping at the people who surrounded the buildings to talk. The girl was glad to be silent. Her attention was absorbed by the house and the assembling groups. With the keenest interest she watched the unkempt men with their tanned and wrinkled faces and the sallow, narrow-chested women, with the broad gold wedding rings on their knobby and toil-worn hands, who stood about in aimless talk, furtively eyeing the strangers in their midst. Every now and then, as if involuntarily, she turned to look again at the finely paneled woodwork of the door with its flanking tiers of small glass panes.

The yard in front of the barn was filling with young men exchanging rough jokes, children running hither and thither unrebuked, and older people gathering to gossip in groups under the trees. Mr. Morrison, the dealer in antiques, was leaning against the side of the house, an unlighted cigar in the corner of his mouth. He nodded occasionally to a passing acquaintance, but was apparently the most indifferent person there.

"He probably came hours ago," said Mrs. Osburn to Marilla, "and looked over everything. He makes up his mind beforehand what he wants and how high he 's willing to bid, and then he tries to discourage the rest of us from bidding against him. But the things he goes after are usually worth getting. I 'm going to keep him in sight."

Just as she spoke, the dealer, at the sound of a stentorian voice announcing that the auction was about to begin, started with the other loiterers toward the barn. She hurried to follow him. The auctioneer, hat on the back of his head, gold watch chain across his ample waistcoat, and necktie askew as though he had been long and feverishly at work, stood behind a table just inside

the barn door, repeating that he was ready to receive the first bid. Mr. Morrison took a position a little behind the crowd, well within range of the auctioneer's eye, where he could signal bids by a nod without the need of words. The rest, amiably crowding one another, drew close, the men in the centre and the women forming a dark-skirted fringe on the edge. The auctioneer was calling their attention to the marvelous collection of monkey wrenches, screw drivers, nails, linseed oil, and steel traps for woodchucks, which he was offering from an assortment his assistant had just set on the table before him. The bidding began very slowly. One red-haired, bewhiskered old farmer, whose suspenders were attached to his ragged trousers by a twist of wire, peered into the box, lifted the bottle of linseed oil, shook it disparagingly, and then bid five cents for the lot. The apparent indignation of the auctioneer was extreme. He lifted up a screw driver to display its perfections to the crowd and stirred the nails with it enthusiastically. Another farmer, whose mouth and shirt were stained with tobacco juice, under the stimulus of the exhortation bid ten cents.

"You 're slow. Are you all asleep?" shouted the auctioneer. His voice was so rasping that it seemed doomed to destruction within a few minutes, but the flow of speech was unchecked.

Another farmer bid fifteen cents. "Fifteen cents I 'm bid," went on the auctioneer, hardly stopping to get a breath. "Fifteen, make it twenty." A man in the back of the crowd nodded. "Twenty, make it twenty-five. I 've got twenty-five, gentlemen; make it thirty. Quick, or down she goes! Twenty-five once, twenty-five twice. And sold. It 's Merrill's over there. Come and get your stuff, Bill. There 's a lot more coming."

A man standing just outside the barn door was busily jotting down the bids and the names of the buyers in a

dingy notebook and making change for those who preferred to pay as they took their purchases from the auctioneer's table.

The bidding dragged a little. As one strange relic after another was brought out from the barn, the men would encourage the auctioneer with shouts of "Set it up. Somebody 'll come along and buy it." When a bearded man, who never bid more than five cents for anything, became the owner of a huge wooden wheel whose use had been long forgotten they assured the company with mock solemnity that "Ed 's goin' to build him a bicycle," and urged others to become owners of similar fantastic objects.

Marilla, meanwhile, listened to the auctioneer's harsh calls and uninterrupted flow of words or walked idly about watching the crowd. The Osburns had gone into the house to inspect the furniture which was to be sold later, and Marilla was left to wander where she would. After a time she went into an open woodshed, which faced the yard not far from the barn door where the selling was taking place. The roof of the shed threatened to tumble in, but the floor was fairly firm, for though the boards sagged in the middle the ends rested securely on stone supports. Marilla seated herself on the edge of the floor, her feet hanging over, prepared to listen and enjoy herself in comfort.

Her face, alight with interest which masked the melancholy of her expression, was framed by her soft hat and her wavy brown hair. She wore a green dress, much admired by her pupils, which she had smocked in a darker shade of green. Though she made all her clothes herself, they bore little sign of the amateur. She had a native gift of design and her dresses achieved a style not common in home manufacture. Her one extravagance was her footwear. Her pretty shoes never failed to stir the admi-

ration of the school children, whose own bare brown feet and clumsy boots were in such marked contrast.

As she sat in the sunlight against the background of the unpainted shed, many a curious look was sent in her direction. Word was quickly passed around that she was a summer boarder in Hill Town. Then one, better informed than the others, explained that she was the new teacher in the River School in Lovell and had come with the Osburns. Curiosity once satisfied, the inquirers turned back to the auction, but stray glances, which she was too absorbed to notice, were attracted to the figure, so trig and erect, and to the face alert with interest.

Marilla saw no one she knew, and she looked from one to another wondering how far she could read the lives and characters from the faces before her.

Two or three men and women, better dressed than the others, stood in the background and let most of the selling go on without apparently paying attention. Occasionally they would bid vigorously against one another for some article of little apparent interest to anyone else in the crowd. An old discolored warming pan, a dilapidated milk stool, a ragged blue hand-woven bedspread, a rusted iron kettle or a lopsided trivet, was sure to bring them into the bidding. They had a detached and calculating air, as though they were there for business and were unaffected by the friendly atmosphere of the auction.

A thin, flat-chested woman, who had seated herself beside Marilla just as one of the men bid for a mahogany mirror, said in an aside, "They 're dealers from Plymouth way. Any old thing you got a mind to sell they 'll buy. I had a chest of drawers belonged to my great-grandmother settin' full of rags in the attic, and they give me twenty dollars for it. I got a real pretty sofa for the money down in Lovell. Makes my parlor look nice, too. My girls like to bring their fellows home to set on it."

Marilla smiled pleasantly, as she answered, "I 'm sure the sofa is worth more to you than the drawers. Our great-grandmothers did n't need sofas. They were courted at the husking bees or barn raisings. Now the young people have to meet each other at the movies or on the streets, unless there are pretty sofas at home. Do you live in Lovell?"

The woman coughed softly before she answered.

"No, I live down in South Lovell, on the old Belcher place. My girls clerk in the store in Lovell, but I ain't very well, and my husband, he has rheumatism in his back, so we stay to home. We have some chickens and a cow and a pig and that 's about all we can tend to. We come to the auction to see if we could get a good milk pail, but there ain't any for sale. Before ever the auction begun, the folks probably give it to their cousin that has a farm up the road a piece."

Marilla said a word of sympathy and they turned again to watch the moving group in front of them.

The door beside Marilla opened and some people who had been looking at the furniture inside the house entered the shed. Several of them went down the steps to join the group in front of the auctioneer, but a man and woman, who were the last to come out, stood by the door for a moment, apparently undecided where to go.

"Let 's sit here, Amelia," said the man. "It 'll be some time before they begin to sell beds, and you don't want to stand all the time."

The woman, who had a quick, competent manner, immediately seated herself along the edge where Marilla and her companion had already found places. The man sat down next to Marilla. The auctioneer was trying to sell some beehives which no one, apparently, wanted, and to the amusement of the crowd he was spending much eloquence in an effort to get someone to start the bidding.

All faces except Marilla's were turned to him. She, instead, was looking at the man beside her. She recognized him as the mill owner of whom, since her arrival, she had been hearing so much, and her curiosity and interest were immediately aroused. She watched him closely. He was not handsome, but the expression of his face, from which all superfluous flesh seemed to have been refined away, was sensitive and kindly. Marilla felt an instant liking for him. She noticed that he was looking indifferently at the people in front of him, nodding carelessly to an acquaintance now and then, and she remembered Mr. Osburn's description of him as a man who kept to himself. His manner certainly did not invite familiarity, but she had spent her life among reserved people, and was not repelled. She would take the first opportunity to speak to him and tell what his Polish friends were saying. She found herself curious to know how he would look when she repeated Mrs. Topolski's words. Would he be pleased or embarrassed? She smiled a little in anticipation.

Marilla's companion began to cough again, not loudly, but with a little soft persistent clearing of the throat. The woman Mr. Walton had called Amelia turned at the first sound and listened intently for a few moments. Then, with a word to her brother, she left her seat and crossing in front of Marilla bent over the shaking figure.

"Have you been coughing like this long?" she asked, with the air of one who has a right to ask.

The woman could not at first master her cough sufficiently to answer. Then she looked up at her questioner and questioned in turn, "You 're the nurse, Miss Walton, are n't you?" At the nod of assent she went on, "Yes, I been coughin' most six months now. I been takin' medicine all summer, but it don't seem to do me no good. Do you know any fust-rate remedy for my trouble?"

Marilla saw her chance. The two women were busily engaged. Mr. Walton, who had only casually noticed his sister's departure, was again looking idly at the circle of bidders. Marilla leaned toward him.

"You 're Mr. Walton, are n't you, the owner of the mill at Lovell?" she asked.

He turned to her, surprised, and answered briefly, "Yes, I am," as though his assent was sufficient to end the conversation. But Marilla was too full of her subject to be deterred.

"I 'm Marilla Lamprey, the teacher at the River School. I hear about you all the time from the Polish people in my district. I 've wanted a chance to tell you what they say," she began, hurrying a little lest his sister return before she had finished.

He made no comment, but waited courteously for her to continue. His air invited no confidences, but it was not forbidding. Marilla went on, full of pleasure in what she had to say.

"I saw two pictures in Mrs. Topolski's house — the Pope's and yours. I recognized the Pope's, but I had to ask who you were. Mrs. Topolski's face shone when she told me. She said you were a friend of all the Polish people. I could see that was not any too common in Lovell." He looked his inquiry. "The Rogers and the Baileys and the Hiltons, round my school, look down on the Poles and won't have any more to do with them than they can help. I don't see how they expect to get along with them if they act that way."

The man's expression became interested and attentive. He spoke in a low-pitched, pleasant voice.

"They can't," he said. "No one can. The Poles must become Americans and those who have been here longest and could help most turn away."

Marilla nodded an emphatic assent.

"You can't Americanize without Americans," she said.

The man did not reply for a moment, but scrutinized her face in an intent personal way as if observing her for the first time.

"If more people in New Hampshire believed that," he answered, "we 'd be a lot better off. I did n't know women ever thought of such things."

Marilla laughed.

"I guess you don't know us," she said, gayly, "though I will confess I never thought much about it until I saw those children. Then I had to, for it was part of my job."

"If you 're willing to confess, so am I," he ventured after a moment's hesitation. "I was an officer in France during the War. I had men of many nationalities under me. When they were all in the same uniform, doing the same work, I could n't tell to which race they belonged. There were some good ones and some bad ones from every people under the sun. In my regiment were a lot of fine fellows, Poles from Pennsylvania. Such fighters as they were, and so brave! One of them risked his life to drag me to safety when I was wounded."

Marilla watched the play of emotion on his face, fascinated. This was the man who was reputed to keep always to himself! If he did, it was not from self-centredness or indifference to his fellows. But she could see that he was embarrassed at having spoken as freely as he did. She interrupted him hastily to prevent any further self-revealing talk.

"There 's no trouble with the children. They 're so anxious to be Americans that their parents have to use force to get them to study Polish. And yet Mrs. Rogers is convinced that they can never be anything but foreigners because English is not their hereditary tongue." She

ended with a laugh, remembering Mrs. Rogers' whole-souled disapproval of the Polish language.

Marilla was at her best when she laughed. Her face was irradiated by her mirth and her amusement was infectious. But Mr. Walton did not smile, though the seriousness of his face lightened a little. Marilla could see that he was a man to whom the ordinary exchange of small talk was neither easy nor natural. Well, neither was it to her! The girls at school had always teased her because she liked to talk about subjects which the others were content to leave to the textbooks. Perhaps he did, too. That would be a bond between them.

He spoke with conviction. "I respect the Poles for wanting to have their children read and write Polish. My Polish soldiers were staunch Americans, but they were happy to feel they were fighting for Poland as well as for their adopted country. One of them said to me with a shrug of his shoulders, 'If I say, Poland go to hell, I 'm no good American.' "

"That was fine," Marilla said. "Of course, disloyalty to one bond is no evidence of loyalty to another."

Mr. Walton was about to reply, when his sister left the woman she had been interrogating and returned to his side.

"I 'm afraid that 's a pretty sick woman," she said, in a low voice. "She lives on the old Belcher place, where they all die of consumption — the windows have n't been opened for fifty years."

Marilla had turned away and was again watching the auction. She overheard Mr. Walton say, "I 've been talking to the new teacher at the River School. I want you to meet her." He brought his sister over and introduced her to Marilla. They had time to exchange only a few words when Mr. and Mrs. Osburn joined them. Marilla left the four friends together, and walked away. She

wandered about a little and finally went into the barn, leaving the tumult of words and the bustle of people outside. All the utensils in the barn had been sold, and the sunlight, finding entrance through gaps in the roof, shone on empty bays, gray with the dust of a century. A few ancient relics, a dilapidated sleigh, some rusted stove lids, one or two split rake handles, unsalable at any price, lay here and there, unlovely witness to the perishableness of man's contrivings.

Marilla looked at the great uprights and the hand-hewn beams that made the skeleton of the structure. Where could one buy such timbers to-day? Yet under the gaping roof they were as surely destined to dissolution as the uncut grass which she could see through the dusty window, withered and drooping in the field without. The melancholy which Marilla so often felt when she looked at the evidences of decay in the state which her forefathers had helped to create threatened to take possession of her again. She started impulsively to return to the sunshine and the cheerful group outside. Just at that moment she saw Mr. Walton enter the barn door. She hesitated, thinking he had probably come to see the condition of the building and would go out again shortly, but he walked directly toward her, saying as he drew near, "You must have many children in your school whose fathers work in my mill. If you need any help with them or any pressure applied to the fathers, I wish you 'd let me know." He reached the end of the barn at the last word and waited for her to speak.

As she caught his grave look, full upon her, she had a moment of sudden self-consciousness. Then she inwardly rebuked herself and answered warmly, "You 've helped me wonderfully already, without knowing it. Helena Pilat has come to school, not rebellious because the school officer forced her to, but eager because you

told her father that was the best way for her to become an American girl. She evidently wants to follow your advice, for she comes faithfully and tries hard to learn."

"They are fortunate to have you for a teacher," he said, emphatically, "for you are willing to understand their problems." He stopped abruptly as though startled by an unwonted enthusiasm, but Marilla answered, "The truth of it is that I really like the children. A pupil has a special hold on any teacher who loves teaching as I do. That feeling helps to get rid of silly prejudices. It 's no virtue. It 's just the way we teachers are made."

They were standing in a half-light near the back window of the barn. The distant murmur of voices in the yard was the only sound they could hear, and they themselves unconsciously spoke in low tones as though intruders in a place which had no welcome for them. Long cobwebs, weighted with dust, hung motionless before the small panes of glass, blurring the picture of the world outside. A barn swallow flew suddenly through one of the holes in the roof, blundered in circles above their heads for a moment, and then darted out again. The eyes of both followed the bird's final sweep into freedom, and then turned, as if instinctively, toward each other. This time Marilla felt no confusion. She had a sudden sense of friendly intimacy in which self-consciousness had no part.

In her younger days she had been without the men friends and admirers natural to and beloved of youth. She had never been able to laugh and chatter as the other girls did, and no man willing to share friendship with her as he would with another man had ever come into her life. The rough boys on the farms about Fairfield and in the town where she went to school had come to the conclusion that she was a "highbrow" and persistently shunned her, and she had known no others. But to this man she could speak freely about the things for which

she really cared. He seemed to understand and share her interests. He evidently felt as she did about these fair-haired Polish seekers for a new life in the rocky valleys and hillsides of their native state. A faith that he might also feel as she did about many of the other facts of existence in this bleak and beloved country took possession of her. She spoke with a new confidence.

"One reason I am so interested in the Poles is that they seem to have a real love of the land. A place like this is really disheartening because no one wants it or cares about it any more. When you think of the man who cleared this field and burned the stumps and piled the rocks and built the house and realize that he and his work are forgotten and what he did means nothing to anyone to-day, it makes you a little sad."

The man glanced through the dim window at the neglected field where the invading pine trees showed tiny spots of green here and there in the clumps of yellowing grass.

"Something of what they did must go, of course," he said as if thinking aloud. Then he turned to her and spoke with energy. "But it is no cause for sadness. Economic laws offer no place for sentiment. After all, the tragic thing would be to raise wheat in New Hampshire at twice the cost of raising it in Kansas."

"But why should all these stanchions be empty? Where are the cows and sheep?" asked Marilla, challengingly.

The man smiled.

"I can't qualify as an expert on cows," he answered, with a disclaiming gesture, "but I do know that if the farmer of to-day should be satisfied, as the man who built this barn undoubtedly was, with the thin milk which a cow gives on a diet of hay, he would never be able to pay off his mortgage. Milk, to be sold nowadays, must have cream in it, and you can't get appreciable amounts

of cream without feeding grain to the cattle. For most dairying, it 's cheaper to take the cow to the grain than the grain to the cow. That 's why Iowa has nearly twice as many cows as people and ships cream and butter in refrigerator cars to New Hampshire where we have one cow to three people and our pastures have returned to the raising of trees."

"Yes, but the sheep," queried Marilla. "What 's happened to them?"

"They certainly are gone," he answered. "I can remember coming up here as a little boy with my grandfather to see the remnant of the flock of merinos for which this farm had been famous for a hundred years. The last of them were sold over thirty years ago, but my grandfather used to tell me of a flock of two thousand pastured on the mountain north of here."

"They must have added to the beauty of the landscape," said Marilla, smiling up at him.

He smiled back, the sober lines of his face melting into an expression of pleasure.

"Perhaps we shall have them back sometime," he said. "Sheep belong to the frontier. They flourish in undeveloped country and get crowded out by cultivation. When New Hampshire reverts to its original wild state, I 'm willing to prophesy our hills will be covered with flocks again."

"And they 'll be herded by Polish shepherds," exclaimed Marilla. "It 'll be picturesque, anyway. I hope I can live to see it. The Poles are bringing youth and energy to these worked-over lands, and they 're bringing beauty, too. I saw Mrs. Dybiec shocking corn the other day, and as she walked down the rows in her bare feet, holding her head high, she was superb — with a bearing like the haughty patricians in old Italian paintings."

"I 'm not familiar with the looks of Italian patricians,"

he answered with a smile, "but I 'm glad to have the Poles in my mills earning money to pay for their farms. They 're the best weavers we have. A few worked at weaving before they came to this country, but weaving must be an ancient craft with all of them, for they learn it so quickly. They know how to farm, too, and if they 'll only be satisfied to stay by the land, New Hampshire will blossom again."

The man's pleasure in talking to her was evident. Marilla wondered what her girl friends would think of the subjects they found to talk about.

"I don't suppose it ever was a very blossoming land," she remarked, with a little smile. "But it did turn out people as staunch as its hills." She looked out of the window at the rocky mountain side dimly visible through the crisscross of spider webs which were woven on its warped frame.

"That 's the trouble," he answered, following her look. "We 're crystallized and finished like the rocks."

He turned to her with a mystified look, and said, abruptly, "But you 're different. How did it happen? You 've got ideas and you know how to express them. You 're not all closed in like the rest of us."

Marilla was a little taken aback by the personal turn of his words. She looked up, but she could not quite meet his eye. In an effort to cover her embarrassment she remarked, hastily, "I know I talk too much, but I suppose it comes of being all day with children who have no chance to protest."

She had hardly spoken, when shadows fell across the doorway and Mr. and Mrs. Osburn peered into the barn.

"That 's where you are, is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Osburn, catching sight of Marilla. "We 've been looking for you everywhere. The lunches are just being given out. As

soon as we're through eating, they'll begin to auction the furniture, and we want to be ready."

They exchanged a few words of greeting with Mr. Walton, and the four walked together out of the barn. When they came into the sunlight, Mr. Walton hesitated, awkwardly.

"I ought to find my sister," he said, looking vaguely about as though a little blinded at the sudden emergence from the dark building. He stood with them a moment, then, with a grave look at Marilla, turned away and left them. She followed the Osburns into the house. The big kitchen, which they entered, had windows facing down the sloping fields and offering a view across the valley to the long line of hills, deep blue in the midday light. While the Osburns collected the bags of doughnuts and cheese which lay on a table ready for free distribution to all comers, she walked to the window and stood looking out, trying to quiet the tumult of her mind. She forced herself to think of the generations of women, happy or discontented, who had washed dishes before that window, seeing the distance in sunlight and in shadow, dark with storm or white with the drifted snow. Even the discontented ones could not have been wholly unhappy. They had courted and loved, held tiny babies in their covetous arms, and watched with pride the unfolding beauties of youth. Marilla felt herself to-day a woman like other women who would sometime come into her own. The pangs of loneliness felt by the sad girl of the Fairfield farm were forgotten in a new sense of the fullness of life. She counted over her blessings like a happy child. She had her school and the joy of teaching. She had the children to love and she would surely find friends among the kindly Lovell people. There were already the Osburns and the Rogers and the mothers of her pupils — and there would be others. The meagreness and sorrow

associated with Fairfield were the memory of a vanishing past.

As she and the Osburns came out of the kitchen, looking for a place to eat their lunch, they met Mr. Walton and his sister coming in. Mr. Osburn made some joking remark about going halves, holding up his bags of food, but Mr. Walton did not stop. His look just brushed Marilla as he passed without speaking. In a silence unlike her she followed her friends to a seat under one of the big elms and opened her bag of food.

Mr. Osburn, with vest unbuttoned and tousled hair, leaned up against the tree, relaxed and at his ease. Mrs. Osburn fed her dog with bits of her lunch. She made him perform tricks before every mouthful and then with a coyness that sat oddly on her plain face looked round the circle of watching children for admiration.

Everyone was in jocose mood. The men were exchanging notes about their purchases, or joshing each other about the rusted and broken tools for which they had bid their nickels and dimes.

The bewhiskered man with the mended suspenders sat triumphant on some beehives which he had bought for fifteen cents. His heavy shapeless boots, tanned by years of treading in manure and scratched and torn by walking among the rocks of his fields, rested on one pile of hives while he himself perched on another. He was eating his lunch, displaying blackened fangs of teeth as he opened his mouth to bite off a hunk of bread. A stout man, whose white shirt and waistcoat distinguished him from the others, came up and pretended to push him off his insecure seat.

"Well, old red-top, how be yuh? Be yuh feelin' rugged?" he shouted, jovially.

The man on the beehives reached out and dug him in the ribs. "City life 's makin' yuh fat 's a hog. Ef

yuh don't look out yuh 'll be lugged off to the butcher's."

"Butchers down my way," answered the stout man, "ain't killin' nothin' 'ceptin' horses these days. They get 'em up here from fellows that 's stung on horse deals."

A loud guffaw from an admiring circle of hearers suggested that the stout man had registered a hit. Mr. Osburn said to Marilla in a low voice, "That red-headed fellow is always swapping horses with someone. He usually gets the worst of the bargain, but he does n't seem to mind that. It 's a game to him, about as gambling on the stock market is to the brokers, I guess."

"Like the salesmanship of Jack the Giant Killer," remarked Marilla, with a smile, her amused look on the pair.

The red-headed man had pulled an old pipe from his pocket, filled it with tobacco and lighted it. Before he answered his tormentor, he took a leisurely puff, then observed, slyly, "I know some folk think they 're good jedges of horses, but they can't tell a donkey when they see 'im in the lookin' glass."

The uproar that greeted this sally seemed to mark the last speaker as the victor in the battle of wits, but the stout man called back over his shoulder as he walked away, "Better not be settin' on them hives too long. May git a swarm of bees under your hat."

## CHAPTER VI

THE afternoon auction began at the front of the house. When the wide door in its graceful setting was thrown open and the auction table was placed before it, the groups sitting under the trees got up, tossed their empty paper bags on the grass, and drew near. Marilla was engrossed in watching the faces of the bidders, some eager, some amused, some indifferent. Every now and then she would turn to look again at the fine lines of the house, the broad pilasters at the corners and the great chimney above. A low rose bush at the side of the entrance, untrimmed and ragged, was covered with red seed pods, which stood out in bold contrast against the dingy white of the house. A man carrying a table he had just bought pushed his way heedlessly across the old flower border, crushing and trampling the brightly burdened branches to the ground. The auctioneer, who had taken off his coat and was frequently mopping his heated face, shouted with undiminished vigor, "Three dollars, make it four; four, make it five. Quick, or down she goes! Four dollars once, four dollars twice! Sold to the lady with the brown hat."

Marilla saw Mr. Osburn carry away the rush-bottomed chair for which his wife had been bidding in competition with one of the dealers, and caught Mrs. Osburn's unconcealed look of triumph as she followed him.

Just then she heard a voice beside her, "You have n't been bidding at all. Don't you care for antiques?"

Mr. Walton had come up to her unnoticed. His words made her wonder if he had been watching her before he spoke. The thought gave her a feeling of pleasure. The world was not a lonely place after all. She turned a smiling face to him.

"Indeed I do," she protested, "but I 'm glad that the

people that brought these things to this farm a hundred years ago are n't here to-day."

She pointed to the door, through which the auctioneer's assistants were bringing chests of drawers, tall bureaus, turned bedposts, banjo clocks, gate-leg tables, and chairs.

"Do you suppose that lovely door ever saw anything like that before? A hundred and fifty years of serving generation after generation, to come to this!"

She marveled at the ease with which she talked to this stranger, as if she had known him always. His simple directness seemed to put aside, as unnecessary, the veil of artificial reserve behind which most human intercourse takes place, and she could offer her thoughts frankly, without self-consciousness.

He followed her gesture, looking at the busy entrance and the amiable jostling crowd, then back to her.

"It 's easy to interpret such things as tragedy," he said, "but I happen to know that this means the beginning of happier days to the owners of this mortgaged and re-mortgaged old place. Years ago the Stickney boys went out to Wisconsin and made good. They 've just sent for the two sisters, who 've been starving here, to join them. The West has been built up by the children of these abandoned farms. You ought to be pleased to have New England live again out there."

"*I* might be, but I 'm afraid these poor Stickney sisters are n't. I just saw one of them in the kitchen, crying her eyes out as she caught sight of the dishes she must have washed a thousand times being hawked about by the auctioneer," cried Marilla.

"Some people can never be reconciled to change, of course," answered the man, "and that means personal tragedy. Any change brings sorrow to individuals, but the grieving generation is soon gone and the next one is better off for what has happened."

"Perhaps," said Marilla, with doubt in her voice, "but I should hate to have New Hampshire become a wilderness again. Just because she 's so rugged and forbidding, she gives us something that we can't afford to have perish with her."

The man laughed. "Our moral convictions are just as apt to crumble in New Hampshire as in a more arable land. There 's something bracing about moral convictions, inflexibly held, but perhaps tolerance would be more desirable."

"Yes," said Marilla, with flashing eyes, "if tolerance is n't just another name for indifference!"

They laughed together. Then he went on, serious again, "My mother typified the New England you revere. She had the sternest sense of right and wrong. Many of the things she condemned unsparingly I have come to feel are only matters of good or bad taste, — the world moves in spite of us, — but her moral insistence remains with me. Such memories become a driving force for life. I suppose that 's what you mean."

Marilla felt a thrill of pleasure. This man did not turn from her, disappointed, but stayed to talk to her and to listen to what she had to say. She flushed, remembering how she had wished she could talk nonsense and be charming like other girls. For the first time in her life she was completely happy to be herself.

The raucous voice of the auctioneer, imploring and cajoling, was heard above every other sound. The bids followed each other with explosive rapidity. Furniture was borne away to waiting wagons and automobiles, dogs fought or played with one another on the edge of the crowd, and a lean cow in the neighboring field drew near the fence as if to see what all the excitement was about.

Under the spell of the sympathy she felt in her companion, Marilla spoke in turn of her own mother, lover

of sunshine and the outdoors, dying uncomplaining in the dim shuttered house, accepting without rebellion in death as in life the stern Puritan doctrine of self-sacrifice and obedience to the will of God.

"I suppose it 's folly not to get up and fight for oneself and for life," she said, "but it 's a divine folly when it faces the inevitable without whimpering."

She described her own repressed childhood in Fairfield and the years of her preparation for teaching with a directness and unconsciousness of self which would have seemed impossible to her a few hours before. But the man's quiet attentiveness invited confidence. He was interested in her description of her teacher of history.

"He felt that his students could not understand the New Hampshire of to-day unless they knew its past. Every one of us had to study its history and respect its traditions. He said New Hampshire was not solely a place of rocks and water power supporting farms and factories, but the home of old bracing ideals which must be kept alive, and he made us believe it."

As she talked, Marilla watched her companion, dreading the chill of criticism or ridicule, but she saw no sign of either. His expression was not easy to read, but she felt both sympathy and response in his manner.

She pointed to the open door.

"There 's an example of what he meant," she said. "That doorway is more than a combination of glass and metal and wood. It speaks from those who made it to us as the cathedrals of France must to the French. Don't you think so?"

"What does it say?" asked the man, curiously, as his eyes traveled back to her face.

She hesitated a moment, trying to put her idea into words, when she caught sight of a woman looking in their direction and beckoning insistently.

"Is n't that your sister?" she asked, nodding in the direction of the beckoning figure.

The man's look of absorption dissolved.

"Yes," he said, hastily, following her look. "She 's buying a bed for one of her patients. I must get it for her."

He moved off abruptly and Marilla saw him a moment later carrying a cot from the auction table to his automobile which stood with the others in the field across the road. His sister waited for his return beside the cot-mattress, which had been tossed on the grass by the auctioneer's assistant.

Marilla walked up to her. "Did you have to bid high for the cot?" she asked with friendly interest.

Amelia's smile was pleasant. She was a tall woman with firm white hands and the decisive manner of one long accustomed to authority.

"No," she answered. "Though it 's old and shabby, it 's not an antique, so no one cared to bid for it. I 'm getting it for one of my tubercular patients, who at present sleeps in the bed with two of her children. I have a fight to get some of these sick people to realize that they 're not only sick themselves but a danger to others." She added with a shrug of mock despair, "They seem to think family affection is an antidote to germs."

Just then her brother came and she pointed to the mattress. "That 's all," she said. "We can go home now." He picked up the mattress, waiting until she had finished speaking to Marilla.

"Seth thought we 'd be here only an hour or two this morning, and I 've kept him most of the day. If he were n't such a patient man, he 'd have gone long ago." She smiled at him, and with a brisk "Pleased to have met you" to Marilla, started off.

Marilla gave a side glance at Seth. He had thrown

the clumsy mattress over his shoulder while his sister was talking. When she turned away he delayed as if about to speak to Marilla, but no words came. He looked at her hesitatingly a moment and then, without even a perfunctory word of farewell, was gone.

Marilla turned to watch the auctioneer and to listen to the humors of the country jokers with a sudden feeling of flatness. The scene had lost its savor. She was listening for the sound of a starting engine in the field across the road. A soft whir came to her ears, followed by the protesting groans of a car straining to back. After a moment's throbbing as the wheels straightened in the track and a quick pulsing of the engine, she saw an automobile pitch quietly over the edge of the slope down the steep road to the valley below.

The girl's pulse slowed as the sound died away. She walked toward the back of the house to enjoy the sweep of hill and mountain visible from there. Her mind was a whirl of remembered words. The woman whom she had seen earlier weeping in the kitchen was standing at the side door, talking to one of her neighbors. Marilla heard her say, "I can't stay out there and see them things I 've polished and cleaned all these years goin' to strangers. It would suffocate me. When Silas sent word we was to sell the old place and everything in it, he 'd forgot how it was. If he 'd been here he could n't of done it. Some antique man 's jest bought the crib my little sister died in when she hed the black dipthery. Seems like we was sellin' ourselves. Look at me, with nothin' but the clothes I 'm standin' in. I ain't nobody, like this, without my things I was brought up with."

The slow tears of helpless sorrow trickled down her cheeks. Her friend patted her shoulder and tried to console her with comforting words about her brother's house in Wisconsin, where the water was pumped into the

kitchen by machinery, and the parlor furnished with a plush set bought in Chicago, but her expression, as of a child that is lost, did not change. She wiped her eyes with a feebly trembling hand and turned back into the house. Marilla was haunted by the desolation in the woman's face. Her body would go to Wisconsin and there, at church suppers and in sewing bees, she would walk and talk like other people. But how much of her would be left forever in this ravaged home, sharing its lasting silence and inevitable decay?

Marilla could not forbear a feeling of unreasoning resentment that the tragedy of auctioned homes should be the antique dealers' opportunity for exorbitant profits. The cheerful faces of the successful bidders with their accumulated piles of treasures seemed to her a needless affront to suffering and sacrifice. She told herself such an idea was folly, that things that were beautiful would give joy wherever they were, but she could not shake off a growing depression which was fed by what she saw about her.

The auction was still going briskly on. To get out of the way of the crowding bidders, she walked down the drive. There, not far from the road, pushed to one side in the long grass of the yard, she saw the old crib, its wide slats and canopy frame enclosing a jumble of glass preserving jars which had been stored in it for safe keeping by its new owner. Marilla, standing a moment beside the worn and battered cradle, felt a pang, as though she were the unwilling witness of desecration. The sturdy sides of the little bed, like strong arms extended to receive a sleeping child, held the heaped-up kitchen ware awkwardly and insecurely, as though in protest at being put to uses for which it was never designed.

Looking up, Marilla caught sight of Mrs. Osburn sitting in comfort on one of the chairs she had bought. She

was evidently waiting, with such patience as she could muster, for her husband to make the move to go. Marilla walked over to her.

"I 'm ready to start home," said Mrs. Osburn from her chair. "Have you had enough?"

"Oh, yes," answered Marilla. "I 'm ready whenever you are. What a pretty chair!"

Mrs. Osburn looked pleased for a moment, then her expression clouded. "The antique dealer gave up bidding for it right off, so I 'm afraid it 's no good. I 'm never sure about an antique till I hear how much the dealers are willing to give for it."

"I would n't care about that," laughed Marilla. "If it 's pretty and will hold you up, you won't need to worry. It 'll be an antique in time."

Mrs. Osburn's look did not brighten very much. She beckoned to her husband, who was talking to a group of men not far away. When he came over to her, she asked, "How soon will you be ready to start?"

"Just a moment," he answered. "They 're just going to offer the place, and I 'd like to know how much it brings."

The women had by now drifted away to the outskirts of the crowd, when the auctioneer announced that the place was to be sold to the highest bidder.

"Seventy acres, more or less, pasture, wood lots, and cleared fields, this fine house you see, two stories high, substantial, all plastered and papered inside, woodshed big enough to store ten cords of wood, barn that can hold twenty head of stock, fine view of the mountains, everything you could want to make a comfortable home, and good farming land on which to make your living. Gentlemen, what am I bid?"

No one spoke. All eyes were on the auctioneer.

"Warm up, gentlemen. Here 's your chance to get a

real bargain. Uncut wood enough on the place to pay you for buying the whole thing. You can get a nice home for nothing that way. Here 's your chance to raise sheep like in the good old days. They tell me there used to be four thousand sheep in this township alone and the finest of them on this very farm. How about it? The Searle baby down to Lovell 's got a pet lamb. You could buy that and begin to raise your merinos. Speak up, what 'll you bid?"

There was laughing and joking, but still no offer. Marilla noticed a face at a second-story window. She saw in a moment that it was that of the woman who had mourned the loss of the crib. She seemed to be listening painfully to the words of the auctioneer, waiting in tense silence for the voice of bidders.

Still no bid from the assembled group.

"They all know they 'd have nothing but the taxes out of such a purchase," said Mr. Osburn in Marilla's ear.

"Pathetic old place," answered Marilla in a low voice, "like some feeble old woman no one wants who must go to the poorhouse."

The auctioneer tried once more to stir the men in front of him to make some offer.

"Just open the bidding, gentlemen. It 'll go by itself if you give it a start," he urged.

When still no word came, he pulled on his coat.

"No bid," he said, his voice as vigorous as at the beginning of the sale. "The auction 's over."

He stepped back into the house, and the crowd in front rapidly thinned. Beds and bureaus, sofas and stoves, lamps and mowing machines, were carried off and loaded on farm wagons or tied on the running boards of automobiles. Comforters bought for ten cents protected the gleaming sides of cars from the rough edges of barn utensils. Drivers found cramped seats in the midst of

glassware and tins, and passengers wedged themselves in between washstands and bread boxes as best they could.

Mrs. Osburn's two chairs were easily placed in the back seat beside her. She held the dog in her lap and Marilla sat in front with Mr. Osburn.

They were all tired by the day and said little on the way back. The trip down the mountain side required all the attention of the driver, for the grade was steep and the demands on the brake unceasing. Mr. Osburn had no time for words as he slipped his foot from brake to reverse and back again in a frantic effort to get to the bottom without burning the bands.

Marilla's reflections were as engrossing for her as the grade for him. This threatened New Hampshire, the thought of which one moment filled her with sadness, the next buoyed her up with hope. So long as men like Mr. Walton were left to carry on its traditions, there was no need for pessimism. He had no easy, unbased enthusiasm, but a true faith and courage. Let her go back on Monday to her work with the Polish children in whom he saw, as well as she, such abundant promise for the future!

## CHAPTER VII

On a warm Sunday afternoon in October Mrs. Rogers sat on her narrow front piazza rocking comfortably and watching the infrequent passers-by. Mr. Rogers sat beside her, his large knobby hands resting idly on the arms of his straight-backed chair. He wore his black Sunday suit minus the coat, which hung on a hook just inside the door where it could be quickly reached if any occasion arose which would warrant the display of such a ceremonious garment. The sleeves of his white shirt were encircled by pink elastic bands, which lent an odd air of gayety to his severe and uncompromising black.

At the window back of them, behind the gently swaying muslin curtains, Marilla could be seen reading and writing in preparation for the school work of the following day. She could overhear the brief remarks of the two about the cars that whizzed by on the highway and their leisurely conversation with chance pedestrians.

"There 's Ewa Zabka," observed Mrs. Rogers, lowering her voice a little. "She 's always hangin' round Miss Lamprey. Seems to come here any time she can slip away from home. Can't say I relish havin' her trackin' in Polander dirt, but it 'll do her good to know what the inside of a decent American home looks like."

Mr. Rogers grunted for reply. Marilla lifted her eyes from her book and looked out of the window. Ewa had stopped a moment in front of the porch and stood there, digging her bare feet in the clipped grass. "Is de teacher home?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Rogers in the severe tone she always used when speaking to children, "but she 's busy. I don't know as she 'll want to see you."

A cheerful voice from within called, "Is that you, Ewa?

Come right in," and Marilla appeared at the front door, which was sacred to Sunday use and was usually kept locked on week days. She beckoned to Ewa and the girl followed her in, giving a scowling look at Mrs. Rogers as she passed.

"I brought you some flowers," she said, her face breaking into smiles when the two were safely in Marilla's room, "and I did n't dig up the roots either," she added hastily, remembering careful instruction in school about the preservation of the wild flowers. She held a great bunch of everlasting in her hands, which Marilla received with more expressions of pleasure than she really felt. The everlasting, with its dusty permanence, had been to her for a long time painfully symbolic of the survival of the isolated communities which had lost the color and fragrance of life and yet persisted, desiccated and unchanging, in a living death. But this girl with her crude young energy, her urge to self-beautification, her passion for living, brought no suggestion of such morbid fancies into the clean cool house. Marilla put the flowers in a vase while Ewa's eyes roamed the room with the covert speed and concentration of an intruder making active use of the fleeting moments. She touched nothing, but it seemed to Marilla that she handled everything with her eyes.

"How nice you look," said Marilla, observing the girl's general appearance with approval. "Do you need any more hairpins?"

"No, I got plenty," answered the girl. "Will you let me look there?" she added, pointing to the large mirror above the bureau. Marilla nodded assent and Ewa stood in front of it, looking at her reflection in the glass as an art devotee might gaze at a masterpiece. Her neat hair, her clean face, the pink dress Marilla had encouraged her to make for herself, her developed figure, her

shoulders and back, were all subjected to the most minute and absorbed scrutiny.

Marilla became a little uneasy at the rapid progress her pupil was making in the vanities of the flesh.

"It is n't enough to be pretty outside. You must be good and kind inside, to match it," she said, emphatically. "It 's for that people love us."

Ewa turned to her with a self-conscious smile. "I got a fella now," she said, tossing her head. "When I wear dis dress, he see me and he say to himself, 'Dat 's my girl,' and he come round when I dig potatoes and tell me all about it. Some day I going to be married wid him."

Marilla looked at her with consternation. "But you 're only fifteen years old, and you can hardly read English. You ought not to be married for years."

"I plenty old enough," said Ewa, complacently. "Polander girls not old maids like you."

Marilla caught her breath, the tone of superiority was so evident and so unabashed, but before she could reply Ewa went on.

"Fadda, mudda, like me get married. Maybe my fella live home and help my fadda on farm."

Marilla felt as if she had released the jinnee from the bottle. Must she take the full responsibility for bringing this new Ewa into being? Vanity was proving to be, not a tool of grace, but a weapon of destruction. She groped for the next word.

"You 'll surely stay in school this year, anyway," she said, almost pleadingly. "You want to talk better English and to be able to read and write before you start a home of your own."

"Yes, maybe I stay this year. I tell my fella, wait till summer. His name 's Stanislaw Lewenopski. He 's only in dis country tree year. He work in de mill, but he don't like to board. He want to live wid me." Ewa

had an air of confidence new to her. It was not the unpleasant self-assertion of the first days at school, but an assurance that kindly yet firmly put even the admired teacher in a subordinate place.

After Ewa had looked long at her image in the glass, she went serenely away, leaving Marilla troubled and unhappy. It would be sickening to have that unprepared, ignorant girl marry, now. She was not fit to make a home.

Marilla sat down with an intolerable sense of incompetence and failure. She had not been able to help Ewa to a fuller life, unless — and her heartbeat quickened at the thought — the girl, guided by ancestral forces below the level of consciousness, had unwittingly helped herself. What vain and futile efforts she had been making to be of use to another! She sat in her quiet room, defenseless against the smouldering grief of her own womanhood which had been by a chance word fanned into sudden flame. Even a child like Ewa could recognize her as the old maid, destined to spend the fruitful years of her life loving and serving the children of other and happier women. Ewa, vain, selfish, meagre-souled, would doubtless be the mother of many, while she must hide her passionate heart in silence and the dark, living the patterned life of the country school-teacher without hope and without self-pity. Her profession, which she loved, was suddenly dust and ashes to her thought and the coming years impossible to face.

She stood up as though to shake off the dark depression that threatened her and walked over to the mirror. The image reflected there she examined far more intently than even Ewa had done. She was searching, as if her whole happiness depended upon it, for an answer to the question, "What is the difference between Ewa and me that makes her loved by a man and me passed by?"

It could not be that Ewa was handsomer. Marilla was without vanity, but she could see that she was fair to look upon, that her hair was curly and full of light, that her features and her eyes were more beautiful than the Polish girl's, and yet — something was lacking! She picked up the hand glass and looked at her reflection from different angles, desperately, as if in search of a clue to the mystery.

Suddenly she blushed furiously, threw the glass down and turned away. No woman of true modesty would ask herself such a question. What if there was in Ewa's manner an invitation to men, a something that said, "Here I am for your delight. Take me!" Could that ever justify a New England woman in exchanging the austerities and the self-control of her world for the self-revealing abandon of a more primitive creature?

With a deep breath as though recovering from a quick wrestle with temptation, Marilla forced her mind back to the thought of Ewa. The girl was heedless and irresponsible. Perhaps the young man might be more open to reason. If he could be persuaded to wait, Ewa might be willing to grow in grace a little longer. From confusedly mingled sources of thought and feeling, Marilla came to a sudden resolve. She sat down by the window and wrote a note to the owner of the mill, reminding him of his kind offer of assistance and saying that a problem had come up concerning one of her Polish pupils and she would be grateful for an opportunity to talk it over with him, as she thought he might be able to help her. She hesitated long before she sealed and stamped the letter, but when the flap was at last securely fastened she walked quickly to the mail box beside the road and dropped it in. She set the red metal signal for the postman slowly, as if again held for a moment by hampering uncertainty.

When she came back, she joined the two sitting on the

porch. Mr. Rogers had tipped his chair against the wall of the house and leaned back, with his hands behind his head, listening to the droning of the flies that were blundering against the screen in persistent efforts to get into the house. He was ordinarily a taciturn man, but he liked Marilla, and when she began to ask him questions about the early Indian legends of the region he thumped his chair back on the level again and sat hunched over, answering her in his cautious, deliberate way. He had read many of those histories of New Hampshire towns which enthusiastic antiquarians write and faithful children of the localities, in Ohio and Missouri and Oregon, buy, and he was well informed. He went into the darkened parlor and brought out for Marilla's inspection inscribed stones he had picked up along the shores of near-by lakes and on sandy stretches beside Little River, where Indians long ago must have found good camping places. He had two or three arrowheads he had turned up with the plough, and a stone hatchet found in the woods, which had been abandoned by some moccasined user years before. Dusk had fallen and the two were still talking. Mrs. Rogers had gone indoors soon after Marilla had joined them, and she called them to supper.

As they sat at the table, eating bread spread with apple butter and drinking milk yellow with cream, Mr. Rogers broke his usual custom of silence during meals by continuing to recount stories his grandfather had told him of the privations and perseverance of the early settlers. Marilla stored them in her memory to repeat at school. The Polish children knew many legends of Poland, full of fantastic superstitions, chronicling the activities of evil spirits of wood and stream and extolling the superhuman courage of the Polish national heroes. Marilla encouraged them to tell all the tales they knew and to learn others from their parents, but she was determined that

they should be no less familiar with the Indian myths of the region about Lovell and with the inspiriting story of the struggles and mastery of the New Hampshire pioneers.

She listened, feeling the poignancy of the tragedy, while Mr. Rogers, in his literal, prosy way, recited the experiences of one of his ancestors who had come as a bride from Hampton more than a hundred and fifty years before to make her home in the wilderness — which was now Lovell Corners. She and her young husband had started out gayly enough, carrying all their worldly goods on their backs. The wife had hung over her shoulder the big kettle, which served bottom up as a seat when the weariness of the hundred-mile walk became unendurable. At first she carried it with a laugh, insisting that it was a basket for holding flowers, but as they penetrated farther into the untracked forest, guided only by hastily cut blazes on the tree trunks, she bore it more and more soberly until she finally laid it down as an insupportable burden on the hearth of the little windowless log cabin at the end of the trail. When, a year later, the husband went north for two months in the winter, to trap the furred animals on the slopes of the higher mountains, the wife and sick baby were left in the snow-banked cabin ten miles of steep hills and drifted valleys away from the nearest neighbor. Even Mr. Rogers' matter-of-fact narrative could not veil the misery of the lonely woman, watching over her ailing baby, who cried weakly day and night and grew gradually worse while the wolves outside prowled and howled through the hours of darkness. The pawing creatures, made bold by hunger, even poked their noses against the cracks in the door until the desperate woman, heating a piece of iron in the fire, thrust it in their faces and sent them away with yelps of pain to nurse their singed skins at a safe distance. After four

weeks the baby died, and was buried in the deepest snowdrift to be found, with frantic prayers to a God who gave no answering sign in the blank whiteness of His world that the wolves would not find the wasted little body. The desolate mother had to wait for weeks, companioned only by agonizing memories and fears, until her husband should return. She had shuddered at the shrieking gales and the snuffling wild animals, and would have liked to cower in the cabin till death released her, too, from her torment. But she must keep herself alive so that the young trapper should not find an empty cabin when he came back to his home. To keep from freezing she had to dig her way through the drifted snow to the wood pile and drag logs back to the fireplace, day after day, until she no longer kept count of time.

As Mr. Rogers prosed along, Marilla wondered how many other tragic epics, worthy of being breathed to life by a Homer, were locked up in forgotten pages of New Hampshire history.

Once started, Mr. Rogers seemed reluctant to stop. He talked on and on, while Marilla listened with shining eyes. It was only Mrs. Rogers' insistence that the cow be milked that brought him to a halt. At her peremptory word he stood up in the circle of light shed by the lamp and moved back into the shadow with a sudden air of embarrassment.

"I hope I have n't talked you deaf and blind," he said to Marilla apologetically, as he started out of the room. "My grandsir was a great hand to tell stories of the early days. He was one of the eight men to get a charter for this town, so I feel as if Lovell belonged to me kind of special."

He walked slowly through the door into the shed with the milk pail dangling from his arm. Marilla, as she watched him go, thought of the contrast between the

farm of this son of the original settlers, with its fields weedy, neglected, and scantily seeded and its house and barn unpainted and shabby, and the farm of the Onskis next to it. Hedwig's father worked in the mill, but he and his oldest boy, with the help of all the members of the family who could walk, grew the biggest cabbages and cauliflowers and raised the earliest sweet corn in the region. His hens seemed to outdo themselves in laying eggs, his broilers fetched the top prices in Boston, and he was not able to meet the increasing demand for the sweet butter his wife stored in her whitewashed cellar.

Marilla knew from Hedwig that the summer before, when the mill had been closed for a week, the Onskis, father, mother, and children, had freshly painted the house and refloored the porch. Hedwig had told her they wanted to be proud when their Polish friends from the town came to see them on Sundays. Marilla wondered that the native American, even if he had ceased to be interested in appearing well before his neighbors, disregarded the sound economy of keeping his buildings well painted and shingled, and his garden and fields free from noxious and encroaching plants. Wherever she went the old wood lots, originally a source of regular income, were thick with the forest weeds of gray birch and wild cherry which by their rapid growth and exuberant fertility were bidding fair to smother the valuable timber trees of the New Hampshire forests.

Marilla said good-night to Mrs. Rogers and groped her way to her room. Before lighting her lamp, she crossed to the front window to pull down the shade. She looked out for a few minutes, her eyes resting on the distant line of mountains faintly lighted by the young moon on the western horizon. The irregular heights and dark valleys lay calm and still as though the earth were eternally offering itself, without elation or regret, to those most com-

petent to wrest a living from its scarred and ancient surface.

Marilla drew down the shade slowly.

"Probably it matters only to the few of us who have the backward look. What difference, in an eternity of time, whether it's Rogers or Topolski?" she said to herself as she undressed and went to bed, drowning anticipation and sorrow, hope and depression alike in the deep and quiet sleep of perfect health.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE following Tuesday afternoon school had been dismissed and Marilla was putting some work for the next day on the blackboard, when she heard an automobile drive into the school yard and stop. She was close to a front window which had been thrown open to let in the tonic October air and, as she turned at the sound, she saw Mr. Walton just stepping out of his car. He glanced up at the same moment and saw her standing, framed by the window jamb, chalk in hand and a bright color on her cheeks. He took off his hat and held it in his hand as he said, almost apologetically, "I had to come along this road to-day on an errand up Miller's Mountain across the river. I thought, if you had time, perhaps you could come with me and tell me your problem on the way."

He had a little unreadiness of manner which betrayed social inexperience. Marilla remembered Mr. Osburn's description of him as afraid of women. Well, if so, she thought to herself, it only gave him a special attraction like that of a shy schoolboy. She glowed with pleasure and answered that she would be glad to go and would be with him in a moment. She tossed the chalk into the box, paying no heed when it fell on the floor instead, and had already closed and locked the windows when he came in the door to ask if he could be of any help.

Marilla took her coat from its hook and started to put it on. He stood watching her for a moment and then said, hesitatingly, "Could I help you with that?"

Marilla assented with an inward smile and handed him the coat. He held it awkwardly and she could with difficulty find the sleeves.

She looked up at him and laughed.

"You 're not an expert at holding coats, are you?" she asked, her smile softening her words while her hands groped for the armholes.

He laughed, too, as though suddenly set at ease by her frank amusement.

"My sister 's so very independent that I get out of the way of being useful," he answered, as she finally got both arms into the sleeves and he pulled the coat into place.

Marilla wondered for a moment if he meant to imply that his sister's way was better, but his kindly look seemed to make such suspicion unjust. As they came out of the building, she locked the door and put the key in her pocket.

"I 'm going across the river," he said as they walked toward the car, "to see if I can get a man who used to do repair work in the mill to help us out for a few days. Our regular man 's sick. If I get you back at six, will that be early enough?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, ready to face Mrs. Rogers' certain disapproval. "That side of the river will be new country to me. I 've walked a good deal on this side, but I 've not yet crossed to the other."

She climbed unassisted into the car while Mr. Walton opened the door by the driver's seat.

Neither spoke while he was starting the engine. When the car swung out to the road and was moving quietly along its graveled surface, the man leaned back and said, with a glance at his companion, "Now tell me how I can help you. Are you having trouble with the children in the school?"

"Oh, no," protested Marilla. "They 're good as gold. I 'm worrying about one of my big girls who thinks she is old enough to be married at the age of fifteen." She related her experiences with Ewa and her consternation

over the unexpected results of her efforts to civilize the girl.

"I thought, even if she has no sense, the young man might have some or could be encouraged to reasonableness by you. His name is Stanislaw Lewenopski, and he works in your mill. Do you remember him?"

"Stanislaw Lewenopski!" exclaimed Mr. Walton. "He's one of the best wool sorters in the mill. Why does he want to throw himself away on a girl like that?"

Marilla, always quick to spring to the defense of any of her pupils, broke in, "I can't be sure that Ewa won't turn out to be a fine woman after all, but she needs time."

"Of course the law will not allow her to marry before she's sixteen, even with her parents' consent, so, unless she's able to lie successfully about her age, you've a few months, anyway," he said, reassuringly.

"I'd forgotten about the law," she answered, with a look of relief. "But she needs more than months — she ought to have years of training. She needs the discipline of school and the steadying effect of real effort in some line before she'll be ready."

"You are asking for more than most of these girls will ever get," observed the man, lifting his hand in greeting to the driver of a slow-moving buggy which he had swerved to pass. The small, scrawny horse, moving with a little short stiff trot hardly more than an ostentatious walk, was guided by a red-bearded man who sat slouched forward, the reins held slackly in his hands. A bulging bag of grain was wedged under the seat and the wobbling wheels toed in and out, as though in recurring uncertainty in which direction to go.

Mr. Walton nodded toward the man as he said, "You're interested in what's happening to the old New Englanders. There's a man who's a descendant of one of the first proprietors of this town. His paternal

ancestor signed the original charter, and his name is constantly mentioned in the early records as building the first mill, directing hunts to get rid of the wolves and bears which terrified the settlers, and distributing seeds for the starting of orchards. This fellow is the last of the line. He lives alone in a tumble-down house in the woods, and what he lives on no one knows. He sells a little firewood now and then. Perhaps that brings him enough money to keep him from starving to death. The children are afraid of him and all sorts of ghostly stories are told about him. That old horse seems to be his only friend. What do you make of that?"

He turned to Marilla with the question and found her eager eyes on his face.

"Mr. Rogers' background is something like that, too," she answered. "But instead of feeling badly about it, I follow your advice and cheer myself with the thought of the brothers of these people developing water power in the Sierras!"

"But is n't that pretty far away?" countered the man with a quizzical smile. "Can you see New Hampshire disintegrate without a pang? Are you going back on your own words?"

She smiled, too.

"You ought to be flattered to have me trying to catch your point of view. But of course I have the weakness of my sex and in my secret heart take it all very personally."

"Stick to economics," he advised. "It 's the only safe and comfortable thing to do."

They were passing a field, overgrown with sweet fern and surrounded by collapsing stone fences. Near the road was an empty cellar hole marking the site of an abandoned house.

"Look at that," exclaimed Marilla, "and then talk

happily about moving industry near the food supply. You would consent to have the very memory of the pioneers die of neglect!"

"You typify in yourself just what 's the matter with New England," said the man with a certain impatience. "You focus on the past instead of concentrating your attention, as you should, on the future."

Marilla's mood changed as she felt the challenge in his voice.

"The future takes its meaning from the past," she said emphatically. "If it did n't, each generation would have to start fresh and you 'd have none of the qualities that distinguish the different peoples. Don't you feel that these original tamers of the soil left something especially for you as their descendant?"

The insistence of her manner, like that of an eager and argumentative boy, repelled him for a moment.

"They left me the job of running a mill without enough helpers," he said, dryly. "I have to close down or go to Canada and Poland for workers." Then he added, as though to change the subject, "I may have to close for a week, anyway, unless I can persuade old Jim Sanborn to come down from his mountain side to help me out. Better get Mr. Rogers to tell you about Jim. He 's another case in point."

They had crossed the river on the loosened, thumping floor-boards of a covered wooden bridge which gave glimpses through its warped and shrunken sides of the rapid waters and the wooded shores beyond. Almost immediately they began to climb a winding road up the mountain. The automobile moved steadily along, its horn sounding a deep-toned warning at the sharp curves. Marilla did not reply to his last words, so engrossed was she in observing his skillful management of the car, and in watching for fresh vistas as the road turned and twisted

through the woods. The sunshine was multiplied tenfold by the brilliant colors of the leaves. So many had already fallen from the branches that it was possible to see deep into the forest where isolated yellow beeches and crimson maples stood out against the pines and reflected the slanting sunlight from their glazed surfaces of gold and red. The background of evergreens was obscured and forgotten in the general riot of color. The stream bed at the side of the road was dusty and dry, but masses of tawny shriveled ferns along the edge showed where water had lingered into midsummer.

The car climbed on between walls of light. The noise of the throbbing engine was the only sound they heard, but it was a voice of companionship. Neither the man nor the woman seemed to feel the need of speech. On both sides the woods thinned and opened until they came abruptly to an end at an old mowing, lying warm and still in the rays of the declining sun, along the edge of which the road ran.

Marilla gave a little gasp of delight. "How beautiful!" she exclaimed.

The man stopped the car, and they turned to look down the mountain side and across the glowing valley.

"I suppose there are lovelier places," he answered, his eyes on the distant line of hills, "but it seems beautiful to us because it 's in our blood."

Marilla felt a little thrill at his unconscious inclusion of herself in his words.

"Is n't that what the past means?" she asked, looking at his half-averted face a little timidly. "The experience of our forefathers has built up something within us that makes us respond to beauties that don't even exist for other people."

"Perhaps," he answered, still looking off. "But I can see it is n't the past, it 's the present that makes me respond

to you. Your way of looking at things is n't just an inherited way. It 's original. I never knew anyone quite like you."

He turned to her as he finished. The meditative look he had given to the luminous landscape changed to one of personal consciousness as he saw the effect of his words upon her. She flushed scarlet for a moment, but she forced herself to say, with the quick impulse of the woman, who fears emotion, to defend herself against it, "I don't believe you know many women, or you would n't say that. You are generous about listening, and that gives one the confidence to speak out."

He made no reply, but started the car again in the direction of a low gray farmhouse a little further up the road. The house was almost hidden by two great elms, whose lower branches brushed the ridgepole and whose leafy shadows wove a lacework across the tiny windows under the eaves. There was no sign of life except a big sheep dog lying in a sunny spot by the front door. He got up as the car came to a stop, and stood there, not barking, but wagging his tail in a friendly way.

"Hello, Tige," called Mr. Walton. "Anyone at home?"

A shrill voice called from the house. "That you, Mr. Walton? Mr. Sanborn 's out gettin' beech nuts. I expect him home most any time."

They could dimly see the face of an old woman, peering out behind a row of geranium plants which stood in battered tin cans on the sill of a little window to the right of the door. Mr. Walton stepped from the car and walked to the window. He took off his hat and stooped a little to speak through the lower sash.

"I 've come to ask Jim to help me at the mill for a few days. The regular repair man 's sick and I 've got to have someone right off. I 'll send for Jim and have him

brought home every day if he 'll come," he added, in the manner of one asking a special favor.

"I dunno," said the voice from inside the house. "His rheumatism is real bad. He don't like to leave me all day alone, neither."

"Now, you know," said Mr. Walton in friendly appeal, "you can get your granddaughter to come and spend the day with you. She can sew rags for her rugs here as well as at home."

"Well, mebbe I might," went on the querulous voice. "But you 'll hev to see Jim yourself. He don't pay no attention to what I say."

To Mr. Walton's question as to where to find him, she pointed up the mountain, where a clump of beeches blazed like a great mass of yellow flame in the sober green of the pines. Mr. Walton came back to the car.

"I 'll have to go up the mountain to find him. I 'm afraid it 's going to take longer than I thought. Will you come with me, — the view is splendid up higher, — or would you rather wait here?" he asked.

"I 'd like to go, of course," answered Marilla, stepping quickly from the car. "It will feel good to walk after sitting so long." She pulled off her coat and threw it on the seat. "I have n't seen a beech nut this year," she added, as they walked briskly along the path.

She had the happy air of a child setting out on an adventure. The man's grave look lightened into a half-smile as they rounded the end of the tall barn and started across the field.

Though she had always lived in the country, Marilla walked with the brisk step of the city dweller, and the vigor of her motion bespoke the energy and enthusiasm of her feelings. She stopped once and turned to look back at the great sweep of the landscape.

"It would n't be quite so perfect, would it," she said

to her companion, who had stopped with her, "if it were n't for the little house? The woods alone are just wild nature, but that house means that someone belongs to this mountain."

"Only because of bitter necessity, I 'm afraid," said the man, as they walked on, adding in explanation, "Jim Sanborn was a smart man when he was younger, but he 's lost his grip. His only daughter ran away with a good-for-nothing loafer and then came back home, starving, with her husband and a feeble-minded child. Jim bought this abandoned farm and put them on it, hoping the man could work it and make a living, but it was no use. Jim 's had to take care of them all for fifteen years, and will, I suppose, till he dies."

"Is the child by any chance Ruby Fox?" asked Marilla, vaguely remembering the school children's talk about the mountain farm where Ruby's grandfather lived.

"Yes," answered Mr. Walton. "Do you know her?"

"She was in my school a week, and left on her sixteenth birthday," said Marilla, remembering the girl with the folded hands and the expressionless face. "It was just as well. The school could give her nothing."

"A year ago my sister taught her how to make rag rugs. She does them very well and they give her occupation. Some of the rugs my sister sells for her to the summer people, and that brings in a little money. But of course that cures nothing. The care and anxiety are there, and will be as long as she lives."

"Why did n't Mr. Sanborn stick to the factory, and let the son-in-law manage without him?" asked Marilla.

"His wife was so anxious to be near her daughter that years ago he moved her to the farm and stayed himself in Lovell, working at the mill and going home Saturdays. But his wife got so crippled with rheumatism that she could hardly move, and he finally left his job and came

here to take care of them all. He gave the daughter and her husband a clearing farther round the mountain where there 's a house. We can't quite see it from here. He hoped the man would do something with it, but he never did. I don't know how they get enough to eat. For several years I 've paid his taxes, for old times' sake. The taxes are small enough, goodness knows, but he does n't seem to have so much as a cent to spare."

They had reached the stone fence at the upper end of the field and were looking for a low place to step over, when they saw a man coming slowly through the woods, carrying a small sack in his hand.

"Hello, Jim," called Mr. Walton. "Did you get many nuts?"

The man's look brightened a little as he came nearer and saw who had spoken. His face had the intelligent expression of the skilled mechanic, but his body was stooped with age and heavy toil and he walked painfully as if each step cost an effort of will.

"Thought I might 's well save 'em as let 'em rot," he answered, starting laboriously to climb the fence. Mr. Walton held the bag and tried to help, but the old man was very independent and refused assistance. Before he had straightened up, after he was once over, he carefully replaced a stone which had fallen from the top of the wall, bracing it precariously with his knee as he slowly rolled it back into position.

"This is Miss Lamprey, the teacher at the River School," said Mr. Walton when the old man finally stood erect.

He nodded stiffly, but he did not speak.

"She came up to see your view," Mr. Walton went on, as the three walked back over the rocky field. "Burleigh 's sick, Jim, and I want you to help us out for a week. There is n't another man round here I 'd trust to

handle the machinery, — you know that, — and there are some repairs that must be made right off."

Marilla, who was watching the old man closely, saw him straighten his bent shoulders.

"I dunno 's I can be spared," he began cautiously. "But," he added after a moment's deliberation, "I 'd like to do you the favor, Mr. Walton. Mebbe I could manage, somehow. I might git Ruby to set with her grandma'am."

He said no more about it, but led the way down the mountain, answering his companion's questions about the potato and hay crop and describing at great length his difficulties with a calf that jumped over fences. As they drew near the house, Mr. Walton suggested, "I could send one of the men who lives on the river road to come for you every morning and to bring you back at night. Most of them have some kind of car."

"Let one of 'em come to-morrer and I 'll see what I can do," he answered. "I don't want you should be in a tight place if I can help you." He accepted Mr. Walton's thanks without change of expression and stood waiting until they got into the car. After they had started off, he limped toward the house, calling in answer to a shrill question from the open window, "Yes, Ma, I told him I 'd help him. Now don't you fret. Ruby 'll take care of you all right."

The sun had already set in a glory of red and gold. As the automobile wound its way down the mountain, the brilliant sky seemed to have absorbed the landscape's color, which was fading to lustreless gray as the darkness rapidly fell.

"I believe the old man likes to come back to work in spite of his concern over the difficulties," said Marilla, breaking the silence.

"Did you notice that?" asked Mr. Walton, with

pleasure in his voice. "I 'm sure of it. He likes once in a while to feel that he 's a good mechanic instead of a poor failure of a farmer. I try to make it easy for his dignity by asking him to come as a favor to me."

Marilla felt a fresh liking for this man beside her. No wonder the Polish people had such a feeling of friendliness for him. The native Americans probably shared it. He was evidently one of those employers who consider the happiness of their employees as important as the condition of their machines.

"But now that I have my mechanic I must n't forget your difficulty. You have n't told me yet how I ought to interfere in the romance of Stanislaw and Ewa," he said. "I 've never advised my mill people about their love affairs," he went on with a half-laugh. "I don't know how they would take it from a confirmed old bachelor like me."

"You could tell Stanislaw that you practise what you preach and are happy in it," suggested Marilla, merrily.

The man laughed, too, then he said with an air of sudden resolution, "I could have told him that before I met you. I 'm not so sure now." He did not look at her as he spoke, but she felt him, silent and tense beside her, waiting for her answer.

She had a sharp contraction of the heart. She had seen this man only twice, and yet he seemed already to ask for a special place in her regard. Surely he was not a person to speak idly about his inmost feelings. She was conscious of an inner shrinking. Though she had been attracted to him from the first and had herself invited this meeting, she had an instinctive fear of the emotion his words implied. She must have time to probe her own heart more completely before hearing the secret of another's. She snatched at any excuse for postponement. What after all did she know of him or he of her?

Just as he spoke the car was entering the covered bridge, whose dark interior was instantly flooded with the white brilliance of the headlights. The driver's eyes were held to the narrow roadway. The light dissipated for the moment the sense of seclusion and intimacy which the dusk of the country road had given. Marilla felt she must change the implications of those brief sentences sounding in the ears of both.

"Tell Stanislaw from me," she began hurriedly, as the car shot out from the bridge, "that I want to make a real American of Ewa. I want her to be a woman he will be proud of all his life, and I need two years to do it. Tell him he does n't want a stupid girl, who can't read or write, to manage his house when he gets to be a rich farmer or when he 's running a store of his own."

The man made no answer. Marilla felt the silence beside her as a palpable thing. The car moved rapidly through the night. Its long lines of light picked out brilliant bits of wayside foliage, only to swing away and let them slip back into the shadows again. Neither of them spoke.

When they drew near the Rogers' house, the man said, "Perhaps what Stanislaw really wants is not a cook, but someone to care for. I 'll see what I can do." The enthusiasm was gone from his voice and Marilla felt that he was hurt and rebuffed. The car stopped in front of the house. Marilla slipped out before he was able to help her.

"Thank you for the lovely ride and for your promise of help," she said, unable in the whirl of her agitated and remorseful thoughts to add another word.

"Good night," was all he said. "I hope I did not keep you too late."

She murmured denial as the car with its glowing headlights moved off like some dark earth creature pursuing

a will-o'-the-wisp which flamed and danced before it just out of reach forever. She stood beside the road, watching the receding tail light till it was nothing but a dim point of red in the distance. She hated to go into the lighted house. She wanted to be alone, in the dark, with her accusing thoughts, and she dreaded questioning faces.

Would she ever see him again? Was this the end of a friendship which had seemed to promise so much?

But, deeper than the surface pang of that possibility, the pain of a question she hardly dared phrase to herself tore at her heart. Did she at last understand why men loved the Ewas of the world and passed her by? Was hers the woman's nature, made for tragedy, which yearns for motherhood yet ever shrinks from the love of a man? Had the crown of virginity, thorned and piercing, been already pressed upon her brow, marking her forever apart from the mothers of the race?

## CHAPTER IX

The week that followed was one of great depression for the new teacher in the River School. The children noticed that she was more quiet than usual, less actively interested in their games, and that she sometimes forgot to answer when they asked a question.

Every moment when she could think without interruption she was going over her past, trying to understand the mystery of herself. As a girl she had wondered at the unfailing interest her classmates at the normal school took in the tiresome young men who came to the school festivities or appeared at the sociables at the church. They had always seemed to her dull and stupid, and she had fled from them. When her classmates were walking or riding with them she had read in the library or talked with her professors and played with their children. Her indifference to the young men had been quickly matched by their avoidance of her. The coquetries and emotional experiences common to youth had passed her by.

But now her outlook seemed suddenly changed. She had, at last, met a man in whom she felt ideas and interests like her own. The play of his mind held her attention every moment that she was with him. There was a thrill in sharing her thoughts with a kindred spirit, as keen as any joy she had ever known. But the upsurge of emotion which she had felt in him the first time they met, strange and unexpected in a man who made no friends among women, had disconcerted and repelled her. She felt as if she had nothing with which to respond, and she shrank from thought of the demands love might make upon her as a prisoner shrinks from the threat of chains. If she should once yield to the insistence of such emotions, would she ever regain herself again? Her fastidious maidenhood, reënforced by years

of independence, stood on guard against importunate rivals.

But as the days passed there rose slowly from the depth of consciousness a passionate urge to surrender. Stronger than the shrinking of the maiden was the woman's yearning for fulfillment. While one side of her nature rejoiced that she had put off the day of decision, the other agonized at the thought that she might have put it off forever.

What woman need fear to trust herself to the leading of such a man? He would want all that a home implied and would learn to love children as she did. Perhaps he already cherished the dream of a child of his own. She felt no tremor or blushing at the sacred thought. Yet she marveled, remembering romances she had read. The lovers seemed to think of nothing but each other, lost in that mutual rapture. Was she, to whom motherhood seemed the greater glory, less a woman than her sisters?

Lying wakeful in her bed she shivered as though with cold. Did life hold nothing for her except denial? She called up against the enveloping dark the face of Seth as he had looked at her once or twice and set her pulses to racing. He was already intimately a part of her consciousness. What place did she hold in his inmost thoughts? Could he summon her image as she did his?

There were moments when she chastised her imaginings as an injustice to him and a pitfall to herself. What were they but wild fancies she was harboring? The fact that a man had looked at her twice, that he had been willing to talk to her and had found her ideas interesting, did not justify her in assuming anything except the merest friendship. She had never had a lover. Girls who had many would laugh at her for making so much of so little. Yet her secret heart offered denial to her own misgivings.

She remembered words and looks that were not those of a casual friend. With an instinct deeper than reason she felt the true emotional kinship between herself and Seth.

She was beginning to think of Seth by his first name, without self-consciousness, as other girls did of their friends. She seemed to herself to be admitting him thus to an intimacy that was both generous and safe.

Although Marilla's manner was frank and cordial, her inner reserve was so great that few could count themselves among her intimates. Seth, too, if report spoke true, was chary of the gift of friendship, and Mr. Osborn had said he was afraid of women. A soft color warmed Marilla's cheek as she remembered the expression on his face as he had turned to her now and then in the car. It was not fear that had given that fire to his eyes. In the confusion of her thought Marilla was conscious of being both attracted and repelled. Above all things she wanted the good gift of Seth's friendship. But did she want anything else?

Sunday afternoon, Marilla was sitting listless in her room. Mr. and Mrs. Rogers had driven off behind their sorrel horse to visit a sister of Mr. Rogers, who had just broken her arm in falling on her freshly washed slippery kitchen floor. Her affliction was regarded by the pious Mrs. Rogers as a visitation of Providence, and accepted with equanimity. Marilla wondered if the injured sister's equanimity was as complete. Her own experience had shaken her faith in any special spiritual sanction attaching to the practice of cleanliness. If Providence had willed the broken arm, as He willed all things, why not take it as a message to the New England housekeeper that cleanliness was no longer next to godliness? Let the Marthas of the old gray farmhouses abandon their eternal scrubbing for some more rewarding pursuit.

Marilla cherished her heresy but had not ventured to voice it to Mrs. Rogers.

The silence of the autumn afternoon was even more complete than that of snow-blanketed winter. The warm peace was not interrupted by the sharp crackling of frozen branches, stirred by the wind, nor by the hollow boom of splitting ice reverberating down the river. Instead its quiet invited to rest. The day had the mellow serenity of age which has finished its feverish work and waits placidly for the night to come.

The silence about her seemed to Marilla to make the tumult of her own thoughts audible. In vain she rebuked herself for her inner turmoil. Some defense, the bulwark of self, had broken down and allowed this man, the first who had ever lingered beside her, to possess her mind. She was becoming less and less able to keep her fancies, happy and unhappy alike, from centring on him.

Cars passed the house now and then, but in her absorption she did not notice them. Even when one stopped at the roadway, she paid no heed. A rap on the side door roused her attention for a moment, but she did not stir. She thought it some friend of the Rogers, who would decide that no one was at home and go away. But the knock was several times repeated, and she went out to see what the persistent caller wanted.

When she unlocked the door, she was startled to see Seth Walton standing on the porch, hat in hand. She flushed and paled with sudden emotion.

"Oh, how do you do?" she managed to stammer. "Won't you come in?" She pushed open the screen door. Joy like a tide was mounting within her.

He stepped in, saying as he did so, "I wanted to report my talk with Stanislaw. I thought you might be wondering whether I 'd been able to do anything."

Marilla felt a warm glow of happiness. Here was a friend who had not misunderstood. He only wanted to help her with these little Polish children, who were in such need of friends! In the presence of his quiet matter-of-factness, she felt an obscure shame at the tissue of assumptions she had built upon a casual word and look. Let her be more worthy of his honest friendship, not imitate the sentimental girl who looks for a lover in every man she meets.

"I long to hear," she answered, her face sparkling with interest. "I have n't dared question Ewa, but I 've been hoping you could perform some miracle. Will you come into the parlor, or shall we sit here? I think this is the pleasantest room in the house, but perhaps you won't."

Seth, familiar with the musty parlors of farmhouses, preferred the sunny kitchen also, and they sat at the window, the table between them. Marilla leaned her elbows on the red tablecloth and cupped her chin in her hands, looking at him as she waited for what he had to say.

He began immediately as though making a business report. "When I spoke to Stanislaw, he seemed very much embarrassed. His mother in Poland has evidently picked out a girl for him over there, and he thinks he 'll have to marry her. In fact, there has evidently been some talk of his sending money to bring her over, but the difficulty of the passport has kept her back, so far. Meanwhile, as he puts it, 'Ewa 's a good girl to kiss. I say to her, "Marry me," but I no mean it.' When he had made that explanation he seemed to think I ought to be perfectly satisfied."

Seth paused, watching Marilla's darkening eyes. "The wretched creature!" she burst out. "What does he care about the woman I 'm trying to make of that silly, vain girl! We teachers know how the Lord must

feel when life bungles with one of His creations. It's awfully discouraging." She threw out her hands. "We try to help these children, and some selfish man or woman comes along and in a moment destroys what we've been struggling to build up."

Her eyes blazed. She seemed to have forgotten Seth in her rage at the man his words had conjured up.

He spoke to her soothingly as to an unreasonable child. "Of course there's no defense for Stanislaw. But after all, what can we do to him? We can't hang, draw, and quarter him."

She looked up and smiled at that, her face clearing a little.

"I'm absurd about my pupils, I know," she said. "I'm like a frantic mother hen with a brood of twenty chickens, and I suspect a hawk in every shadow. But I do feel specially responsible for these Polish children. They don't have the natural safeguards they had in Poland where their environment was part of their heredity. We've got to supply them with extra protection. The parents are almost as helpless as the children. Mrs. Zabka said to me the other day, with tears in her eyes, 'I no lick Ewa any more. She too big. She fight me.'"

"That might explain Ewa," he interrupted. "What can you hope with such a mother?"

"It's just a case of parental manners, that's all," said Marilla with a smile. "The Polish parents love their children devotedly. For all we know they may have a deeper family loyalty than the native-born. After all, a 'licking' shows more interest than the careless inattention to the whereabouts of their daughters I see in some American families."

Seth started to reply, when the clock on the narrow mantel above the stove struck three, harshly, with much labored rasping of its internal parts. The sharply re-

iterated strokes, in their energy and incisiveness, seemed to rebuke the loiterers of the world. Seth got up abruptly as though provided with a signal for which he had been waiting.

"I came to suggest that we go together to the Zabka farm on Sleeper Hill and talk to Zabka himself about Stanislaw and the girl. Anything that 's done will have to be done by him, and there may be some mysterious Polish custom or taboo associated with the whole matter that we can't understand and would bungle if we tried to handle the thing alone," he said.

"Does n't the father work at your factory?" asked Marilla in surprise.

"He does off and on," answered Seth, "but his boy, who works in the packing room, says his father 's busy on the farm just now."

"I don't know what can keep him busy on a farm in October," mused Marilla, puzzled. She stood up, pushing her chair back under the table. "I think that is quite the best thing to do, to talk to the father. He is strong enough to 'lick' the poor girl, if necessary. Perhaps the threat of it would be enough for the present."

"I have my car here and we could ride," said Seth, as they came out on the porch, after Marilla had gone to her room to get a sweater. "Or, if you cared to walk, I could show you a path I knew when I was a boy."

"I never had a car," she answered, as she locked the house door behind her, "and the result is that I have n't lost the ability to walk as so many of you auto owners have." She slipped the house key behind the window blind and turned briskly. "I 've been moping in the house all day. I 'll go back to school to-morrow a much pleasanter teacher for some vigorous exercise. Let 's walk."

## CHAPTER X

They walked across the Rogers' fields to the heavily wooded slopes behind. The day was slightly overcast, and the leaves, thinning rapidly as the wind tugged at their loosened stems, burned with a duskier fire than when the sun flamed full upon them. The two pushed their way through the fringing bushes at the foot of the hill and soon fell into a faintly marked path, zigzagging up the steep hillside. Seth, who was leading the way, turned at a sudden exclamation from Marilla. A branch, which he had pushed aside, had snapped back and flicked her in the face as she followed close behind. He was instantly full of self-reproach and remorse, out of all proportion to the hurt. Marilla, laughing it off as a trifle, tried to hide from him the red streak on her cheek. The mark faded quickly, but not apparently his memory of it. She was conscious from then on of a solicitude and watchfulness which one moment fretted her as an interference with her free-moving habit of walking and the next gave her a feeling of exaltation that this man, unaccustomed to the company of women, was searching out ways new to his inexperience for her comfort and protection.

The quiet woods through which they passed seemed to offer haven to nothing that lived or moved. Most of the migrating birds had already passed to the south, and the wintering crows and jays, the chickadees, and nuthatches, had left the higher slopes for the more sheltered swamps and lowlands. But the still warm air was full of the perfume of the pine needles. As the two caught the delicate odor, they seemed to themselves to be moving through a tangible substance.

The path in its windings occasionally slipped out from beneath the pines and passed under the yellowed foliage of beech trees. Again and again they looked up to see

if the sun had suddenly pierced through the clouds. But each time it proved to be the unexpected golden radiance of the leaves. Through openings in the woods the gray sky showed, still unbroken, and little masses of gathering mist lay cuddled between the folds of the hills like nesting fledglings. The deep peace held as they climbed steadily above the valley, whose tree-edged river swung back and forth in lazy curves between its narrow, neatly mowed fields.

The path ended in a pasture, gray with ledges and overgrown with the sweet fern which not even a hungry animal will touch. In the corner of the pasture where the path had brought them was one of the little family burial lots, fenced in with stones, which are found on so many of the old New England farms. Death had overtaken the pioneers in their isolation, before the church had been established or the forests cut down, when the only place safe and protected for their eternal rest was that close to the farm buildings in the midst of the ploughed fields and pasture clearings of the new home. The reluctant soil, forced to yield food to their necessities, offered bare and grudging shelter to their worn-out bodies. In this little enclosure the trees which commonly shade the headstones and guard the humble mounds were strangely lacking. Marilla saw large stumps, still yellow with recent cutting, along the encircling wall.

"Look," she exclaimed, "this is what has kept Mr. Zabka busy on the farm. He has cut down all the trees in the burial ground."

Seth looked in silence at the havoc. Piles of slash had been heaped on the wall and tossed into the pasture. Marilla noticed that the graves alone had been left, naked and uncovered. In the general ruin, the toppling headstones had acquired a fresh desolation which the pines must once have masked and softened.

Seth stooped to read the names still dimly legible on the moss-covered stones. "Frazier, Sleeper, Morse," he observed. "They've all left this part of the country. If the Poles don't remember and care, no one else does either. I don't see how we can feel any resentment."

"I don't suppose there's any intent at desecration," said Marilla, removing some fallen brush from a tall slate headstone with a weeping willow incised in its arched top. "I've talked with the school children, and I think the Polish peasant's idea of beauty is different from ours. It may be that they fell trees when we leave them because they think a clear landscape has a perfection our broken sky lines lack. I wish I knew what cemeteries in Poland are like."

"Of course, what stirs sentiment in one man may rouse nothing but contempt in another," said Seth, as they walked across the pasture. "Who knows in how many ways we have shocked the susceptibilities of the Zabkas!"

"Or will in a few minutes," laughed Marilla, feeling delight in the sympathetic comradeship of his thought which matched with hers.

At the end of the pasture they ascended a little rising ground, terraced by generations of feeding cattle and sheep, to the unpainted old farmhouse near the summit. The building, set into the hill, was connected by a series of irregular sheds with the barn, which was built on the slope at a still higher level. The stalls for the cattle rested on the foundation ledges of the mountain, and the haymow above could be entered from the surrounding fields. The whole low, clinging structure looked as if anchored to the earth, saved by the security of its fastenings from being uprooted and tossed down the hillside by the sweep of the blizzard-bearing northern winds.

Several automobiles were parked on the road which by devious ways had wound its way up from the valley below, and a number of women and children were standing in the yard or sitting on the grass, laughing and talking.

"Sunday is the great Polish visiting day," said Seth to Marilla as they drew near. "We 'll have a hard time getting Zabka alone!"

"We 'll have to manage," answered Marilla hastily as Ewa stepped out from a group of young people and walked toward them. The hum of talk had come to a sudden stop and everyone was looking at the newcomers. Seth greeted several of the men, workers in his factory, and Marilla noticed with almost a proprietary thrill their friendly smiles and cordial greetings to the man upon whose wise and kindly conduct their satisfaction in their work depended. She was conscious, in addition, of their covert glances at her. The Polish colony would probably be buzzing with surmises before morning. They would misinterpret what they saw, of course. Friendship between the sexes was outside the bounds of their experience or belief.

Ewa and Mrs. Zabka drew Marilla into the circle of women and introduced her to those she did not already know. She noticed Mrs. Pilat among them, having less the look of an Italian patrician in her Sunday best than barefooted in her own garden. Hedwig Onski's mother was there, shining with cleanliness, carrying in her arms her latest baby, as daintily clothed and cared for as if born to rock in the cradle of kings. Marilla begged the privilege of holding the child, and sat on the grass beside the mother, bending over the little creature in a glow of joy. The mothers watched her and exchanged friendly, understanding glances with one another.

"You like babies?" inquired Mrs. Dybiec. She was a

small, fair-haired woman with a harried look, less ready with smiles than those about her.

"Oh, yes," said Marilla, looking up at her questioner, her face sweet with the emotion she had been lavishing on the child.

Mrs. Dybiec's expression softened for a moment, but she said with a sigh, "Babies lots of work. Polish women too many babies." Her words brought a soft chorus of assent from the other women in the group.

Mrs. Zabka was standing behind Mrs. Dybiec. She burst out in her harsh voice, "Babies all right, but big boys and girls no good. Need lickin' all time. In Poland children good. In America no mind fadda and mudda. Want to go movie all time. No want to work."

She paused, breathless after so long a speech in English, but triumphant at having voiced a burning truth. The chorus of assent this time was unmistakable. The mothers turned to one another and talked in rapid Polish, apparently bearing witness from their own experience to the truth of what she had said.

Marilla could not understand their words, but she could gather the sense of what they were saying. It brought to her mind the yet unfinished task to which she and Seth had set themselves. She kissed the baby's soft cheek and laid him in his mother's lap.

"Mr. Walton and I want to speak to Mr. Zabka and then we must be going. We walked up, and it 's a long way back," she said in explanation as she rose and started toward the group of men. The women made no remark. They had learned to accept the strange ways of American women without making the hopeless effort to understand them.

Seth detached himself from the men and came toward her with Ewa's father by his side. "I 've asked Zabka

to show me how the barn is built into the hill. Will you come, too?"

Marilla met his look, which expressed a special understanding between them, with a somewhat heightened color. She walked beside them to the barn without speaking. Under Zabka's guidance they first inspected the dark, warm quarters for the cattle on the lower level. As they came in, they could see a half-grown calf rubbing her budding horns on the gray ledge which formed the back wall of the basement. She lifted her head and looked at them with gentle, friendly eyes. Marilla reached out her hand in invitation and the calf took a step or two toward her, picking her way across the irregular floor where occasional rock surfaces stuck up through the layers of manure, and licked her fingers hopefully.

"You want to see hay?" asked Zabka, as they came out into the light again.

"Shall we?" Seth looked at Marilla questioningly.

As she nodded assent, she flushed a little again at the sense of their joint contriving. They admired the loft of hay and the bins with their husked corn. Then Seth said, suddenly, "By the way, Zabka, did you know that Stanislaw Lewenopski has a girl in Poland who is coming over to marry him?"

"Maybe," said Zabka, indifferently. "I no care."

Marilla broke in, "But Mr. Zabka, he talks to Ewa about marrying her. She won't work at school because she says she 's going to get married and does n't need to learn any more."

Zabka's stolid expression did not change.

"Maybe I lick her hard," he said. "She no help her mother. All time wash her face."

Marilla looked at Seth with an expression of perplexity. Then she turned again to Zabka.

"It 's good for her to wash her face," she said, feeling on secure ground for the moment, "but she 's too young to marry. Stanislaw talks about marrying her, but he has another girl in Poland. You don't want him to get her into trouble."

Zabka looked at her with an expression she could not fathom. Was it distaste at a strange woman's speaking to him of such things, or was it distrust and suspicion of her interest?

"I lick Ewa. She no have trouble. You walk with man. You no get in trouble. I take care Ewa."

Marilla was completely taken aback. She felt the emergence of the primitive man in this hard-faced peasant. His was the type which saw only what met the eye, whose mind was closed to the fine shades of civilized conduct. Seth and herself; Ewa and Stanislaw! To his stolid simplicity there was no difference.

Seth was speaking. "When Ewa is as old as Miss Lamprey she will know how to take care of herself. She is too young now for anything except school. You tell Stanislaw to keep away from her, and take better care of your daughter yourself."

Seth's voice was ringing and stern. Zabka's belligerent air left him. He looked bewildered and muttered something indistinct under his breath. Seth pointedly ignored him, and said to Marilla in his ordinary tone, "I think we had better start back. It gets dark early now."

With a sense, unfamiliar and strangely welcome, of having to depend on another to protect her from unpleasantness, Marilla followed him from the barn. They walked down the slope, saying good-bye to the scattered groups as they passed. Marilla had a moment's dread of prying, critical eyes, but the pleasant smiles of the mothers reassured her. Her spirits rose as the woods opened before them and hid them from observation.

Zabka stood at the door of the barn, watching them as long as they were in sight. His expression of bewilderment did not change, but it darkened into anger as he noticed Ewa running across the grass in the pink dress Marilla had helped her to make. He kicked the door shut behind him and strode down the slope toward the house.

Seth and Marilla did not speak until they had gone some distance along the wood path. Then Marilla burst out, "That 's what comes of my trying to interfere when I don't really know enough to do it well. Mr. Zabka understands me and my ideas as little as I understand him. I am sure he meant no offense. But why do you suppose he thinks we came? And what are the marriage *mores* of the Zabkas, anyway?" Her laugh was half merry and half rueful.

Seth drew a breath of relief. "I 'm sure you 're right not to take offense. I was angry for a moment for your sake, but of course he implied no more than we were implying. Why do we always assume that we 're no mystery to the foreigner, no matter how much of an enigma he may be to us?"

He was leading the way and turned to face her as he said apologetically, "I want you to forgive me for bringing you into such unpleasantness. I should hate to think your feelings were hurt."

Marilla could not quite meet his eyes, but she smiled at him as she stood above him on the path, stripping leaves from a branch she held in her hand, and said, "You must remember that it was I who got you into this by asking your advice."

"Then it 's all forgiven and forgotten?" he asked.

"There 's my hand on it," she said gayly, tossing the branch into the bushes and holding out her hand with a frank gesture of comradeship.

He took it in both his and held it close, looking at her intently. She flushed and drew her hand away.

"Had n't we better be going on?" she said in a confusion that astonished her.

He turned at her word and led the way down the leafy path. It was not yet dark, but the shadowy tree tops held the dimming light entangled in their branches and shaped little pools of blackness at their feet.

Seth was the first to break the silence, speaking quite in his ordinary manner. "A Ruthenian priest who was with my company in France said something to me that stuck in my memory. He came from Pennsylvania and the men of his parish worked in the steel mills. He said, 'My people do not live in America, they live underneath America. America goes on over their heads. America does not begin for a man until he is earning more than a living wage. A poorly paid laborer cannot afford to be an American.' I thought it was interesting and probably true."

Marilla drew a breath of relief. They were back once more on familiar ground where she could tread without fear. She fell in with his thought happily.

"That's the best part of the Poles being in a place like Lovell. They can afford to be Americans here. They 're scattered instead of being in a Polish quarter, and they can get the full effect of the new environment. They 're individuals, not just members of a race."

Seth turned to her with a smile. "But see what environment did for the Zabkas to-day!"

"Never mind," insisted Marilla, cheerfully. "Their knowing how we feel may make a difference, even so, though I wish Ewa's father knew some other argument than a stick."

"The girl probably would n't understand anything else," said Seth, adding decidedly, "But I have learned my

lesson. I shall keep out of Polish love affairs after this."

They had just come out of the woods as the path crossed some bare ledges. Marilla stopped almost unconsciously, her eyes absorbing the beauty of the great sweep of landscape as she answered.

"That *is* a rebuke! You make me feel as if I ought never again to ask your help with my Polish children. But who else can understand as you do!" She turned to him with the same brooding look in her eyes that she had bent upon the distant hills. She was quickly recalled to the present by his words.

"You can call upon me for anything. There 's nothing you could ask me I would n't be glad to do." He hesitated as he saw her look change to one of uneasiness and distress, and added more quietly, "You see, I think of you as having come to Lovell to help us see ourselves more clearly and give up our rooted prejudices. You must dig me out of my hole by demanding my help."

"What a mission for a person as full of prejudices as I am," said Marilla, smiling, herself again. "I 'm rock-ribbed in conviction. For one thing, you can't convince me there is anywhere in the world a view lovelier than this!"

Her gesture swept the horizon. Seth took his eyes from her face long enough to print on his retentive memory the rounded contours of the hills, which were rapidly taking on the hue of dusk.

"We must hurry on or you may stumble in the dark on the rough path," he said, turning back to her. She started to cross the ledge, but he caught her arm and steadied her until they were in the woods again. Remembering his awkwardness when she first saw him, she marveled at his rapidly acquired ease. What was teaching him? She did not answer her own question, but followed him with a new submissiveness, stepping with care as he

called her attention to a loose stone or a half-hidden tree root at her feet.

When they reached the house, the darkness was upon them. There was no light in the window, and Marilla groped for the key behind the blind.

"The Rogers have stayed longer than they expected," she said, as she unlocked the door. She did not ask him in, but stood with her hand on the door knob, her face white in the shadows of the porch, looking at him. "I do not know that we have done Ewa much good, but we have tried, have n't we?" she said. "And I 've had a happy time, anyway."

Seth stammered something, straining his eyes to catch her expression as he spoke. Then he said, more distinctly, "Will you go walking with me again, sometime? I know other paths. Or perhaps you 'd rather ride in the automobile?"

"Why not a little of both?" laughed Marilla, audaciously, secure in the shelter of the darkness.

"Fine!" he said. "Good night." He lifted his hat, trying again to pierce the darkness, but she had opened the house door and was already engulfed in the blackness of the room behind her. As he walked to his car, he carried with him the memory of her light laugh and of the spirited toss of the head he had vaguely glimpsed before she disappeared.

## CHAPTER XI

SEVERAL weeks passed and Marilla saw nothing more of Seth. The shrinking uncertainty associated with her thought of him was becoming rapidly transformed into concern at the growing conviction that he had never really cared for her or desired the friendship he had seemed for the moment to covet. It was doubtless no more than the way of men, but it made her suffer. Why cruelly rouse emotions that can bring only sorrow in their train? She tried to forget the new vividness of feeling which his entry into her life had brought and to find solace in the activities of her school, but her heart was heavy during the day and her pillow often wet at night. She dreaded being much alone and spent her free time with Mrs. Rogers, listening to the neighborhood gossip or exchanging notes on the best ways of keeping house. The matter-of-fact directness of the brisk little woman was bracing to a mind torn by conflicting emotions.

One snowy afternoon the two were in the kitchen, Mrs. Rogers at work and Marilla sewing on a fancy apron she was making to wear at school. Mr. Rogers had gone to Lovell in the early afternoon and supper was waiting until he should return. The kitchen stove, its iron surface black without a blur and its nickel trimmings shining with reflections of the lamplight, gave forth a steady mild heat. An earthen kettle, streaked and darkened by years of cooking, stood on the back of the stove, full of cooling apple sauce whose color was deepening to a rich reddish yellow as the fragrant steam drifted off into the room. Mrs. Rogers had set the table some time before, and Marilla, sitting in her accustomed seat, was careful not to displace the drinking glass, the thick white plate, or the knife, fork, and spoon which were arranged on the white cloth before her with an eye for geometrical precision.

She had to lean over a little, so that the light from the lamp on the table might shine on her work, but she did not venture to shift its position.

"The Onskis had a party last night. Did you hear the racket? I could n't sleep for the noise," said Mrs. Rogers, coming up from the cellar with a pie in her hand and setting it in the oven to heat.

"I did hear some singing. Was n't someone playing dance music? It put me to sleep," answered Marilla.

Mrs. Rogers' lips tightened. "It was n't real dance music," she said. "Mr. Onski 's bought a victrola, the loudest kind that's made, and they kept it goin' most of the night. I suppose the house got so hot, with all of them dancin' those wild Polander dances, that they had to open the windows and keep me and Obadiah awake. I say it 's uncivilized."

"Hedwig certainly was tired at school to-day," declared Marilla. "She put her head on the desk and went to sleep once. I let her sleep, because I suspected they 'd been having a lively and exhausting time at her home."

"Well, if I 'd been teachin' in that school as I 've taught at other schools," said Mrs. Rogers, severely, "I 'd have made that girl lift up her head and go to work. Not that I want to interfere with the way you run your school, but I 've no patience with such frivolous doin's. These Polanders have too many good times to be real true Americans."

"Oh, now, Mrs. Rogers," protested Marilla with a smile, "you know lots of Americans have dances, too, even right here in Lovell."

"Yes," said Mrs. Rogers triumphantly, "but they 're respectable about it. They don't have a noisy time like these Polanders."

Marilla smiled to herself, but she went on with her sewing.

The sound of a horse's footfalls, muffled in the soft snow, were audible through the window and the jingle of sleigh bells moved past the house and came to a stop in the barn.

"There 's Obadiah now," exclaimed Mrs. Rogers, suddenly active. She pushed the kettle to the hottest part of the stove, poured tea from a tin canister into the chubby brown teapot, and hastily brought up a pitcher of milk from the shelf by the cellar stairs. She had the respect of her generation for the man of the house and was as fussily anxious to please her mild Obadiah as though he had been the ogre of the fairy tale. She was cutting bread in the pantry when her husband came in, stamping the snow from his boots at the doorsill and looking about for her as he shook the last of the thawing snowflakes from his heavy coat. Though he greeted Marilla as he hung his wet things behind the stove where they would dry, he said nothing to his wife when she came out of the pantry with a plate of bread in her hand.

But Marilla caught the expression of the big awkward man as he looked at the bustling little woman, and it made her think, incongruously, of the face of a shy child safe with someone it trusts. His eyes were eloquent of security and peace, which even his wife's exclamations of distress at the snow he had tracked in could not disturb. Marilla had a sudden feeling that she would not have noticed or understood that look two months ago. What had happened to her? Was she growing more conscious of the dependence of human beings on each other and more sensitive to its indications?

She put her work aside and stood up to peer through the frosted window, only to turn back disappointed, for all she could see was the reflection of the lighted kitchen like a bright picture etched on the cold surface.

"Is it still snowing?" she asked.

"Just a little, but it 's turnin' colder," answered Obadiah, warming his hands over the stove. "Should n't wonder if we 'd get a storm from the north before mornin'."

"That 'll mean a cold schoolhouse to-morrow," thought Marilla, sitting down in her chair again. She made no offer to help with the supper. Mrs. Rogers had her own way of doing things and did not welcome assistance. Marilla had early learned to withhold her hand, and she and Obadiah sat submissively at the table, waiting until Mrs. Rogers was ready to serve them.

When the food was in place, the three began to eat in the silence which is the traditional table etiquette of the farm. Marilla, familiar with the custom through long experience, always chafed at its restrictions. To-night she voiced her rebellion by saying flippantly to Obadiah, "What 's the news in the great metropolis of Lovell? Any murders or sudden deaths?"

Mrs. Rogers looked a guarded disapproval, but Obadiah brightened up. He found Marilla an increasingly welcome diversion in the quiet routine of his days and was breaking through the habit of years, even risking the disapproval of his wife by talking to her at meals.

"The Legion parade on Armistice Day 's left lots of hard feelin'," he said in his deliberate way, spreading apple sauce on a thick slice of bread. "The fellows that went across the water are sayin' that the fellows that got stuck in Camp Devens act as if they 'd won the war. Anyway, they grabbed all the best places in the procession. It pretty near makes me a pacifist to hear them boys scrap," he ended, humorously.

"Well, it don't me," burst out Mrs. Rogers. "I 'd like to know who 's goin' to protect the women and children if the pacifists have their way." She bridled a little as she sat erect, taking her food in tiny mouthfuls, like a no-

tional child. She was a small eater, at best, and her ill-fitting false teeth took away most of her pleasure in her food.

Marilla smiled but said nothing. Obadiah went on, "Sid Brown says he stocked up this fall with a lot of apple butter, but he can't get nobody to buy it. He says it seems as if the days was gone forever when folks knew what was good to eat. His grandma'am used to put up apple butter in kegs and him and his brothers never could get enough of it, but now the old New England folks won't eat it, and of course the Polanders don't know good American food when they see it."

"They certainly know good Polish food," said Marilla. "I get the Polish children to let me taste some of the things they have in their lunch boxes at school, and they are wonderful — spiced rice rolled in cabbage leaves and boiled, and cottage cheese with chopped onion sprouts, and a sweet bread that would melt in your mouth."

"You eat food out of them Polander houses?" asked Mrs. Rogers, with an expression of horror. She was cutting the warm mince pie, which she had just taken from the oven, and paused with the knife suspended in the air.

"Why not?" laughed Marilla. "You ought to go into some of their homes and see what they 're like. You stay outside and imagine terrible things!"

"I never expect to go inside a Polander house as long as I live," said Mrs. Rogers, fervently. "They can keep to themselves, and I 'll keep to myself."

Marilla wondered whether her landlady could keep to herself, even if she wanted to, but Mrs. Rogers cut the pie with the firm manner of one who has definitely disposed of a controversial subject.

Obadiah took the piece that was handed to him, and, after painstakingly rotating the plate until the wedge was

pointed in his direction, leaned over and started to eat. He teetered his fork across the tip with great care and methodically cut off section after section until he had eaten to the rim of the crust. Then with the same deliberation he shifted his plate until the cut end of the crust faced him and, without pause or speech, ate the rest of the fluted pastry. When he put down his fork with the air of completing an important piece of work, there was nothing left on his plate except a few scattered crumbs which the tines could not hold.

Marilla, to Mrs. Rogers' secret displeasure, always left part of the crust uneaten. As a result, she was through supper to-night before the others, and sat idly watching them finish. Obadiah drained his cup of tea noisily, throwing his head back to get the last drop, then pushed his plate away and tilted his chair against the wall.

"They 're havin' a lot of flu in town," he said, taking a toothpick from the small glass on the table and chewing it leisurely. "Miss Walton 's so busy takin' care of her brother, she don't get round to nurse anybody else. Sid Brown was sayin' — "

Marilla interrupted him. "Is Mr. Walton sick?" she asked.

"Yes, Sid Brown was tellin' me he 's awful sick. Went down to Boston to buy wool, three weeks ago, and came back kind of ailin'. Took to his bed, and 's been there ever since. Sid was kind of surprised I did n't know. Said the *Lovell Times* had a long piece about it last week. But I told him I don't bother to read the paper."

Marilla waited, breathless, but Obadiah leaned comfortably against the wall, turning his toothpick in his mouth, and said nothing more.

"Is he getting better?" she asked, in a faint voice.

Obadiah took the toothpick out of his mouth and eyed its tip critically.

"They say he 's out of his mind most of the time, but the doctor calls it just only weakness. He 's goin' to get well, all right. But his sister, she won't trust him to nobody. All the other sick people have to get well the best they can. She won't leave him. Funny how some people think there 's nobody but their own."

"Don't all of us?" exclaimed Marilla, impulsively, as if welcoming the chance to express an emotion that was not personal. "I 'm sure if I had a brother I 'd think of him first."

"Maybe I 'm wrong," said Obadiah, amiably, "but I kind of think a nurse ought to be different."

Marilla was able to laugh at this. "I guess nurses are about like the rest of us," she said. Then she added, trying not to look too concerned, "Is his trouble the flu?"

"Yes, that 's what they 've all got in town," answered Obadiah, getting up as if suddenly remembering something. "Sid says he 's advisin' everybody to take some of that hoss tonic he sold me last summer, to keep off the flu. Says it 's just as good for humans as for hosses. He 's been takin' some, and he ain't been sick a day sence he started. Where 'd you put it, Emma?" He had started to rummage in the dark kitchen pantry before he finished speaking.

His wife, who had just stacked the dishes on a table by the sink, took the wall lamp from its bracket and followed him into the closet. She held the lamp as high as she could and pointed to the top shelf, where stood a row of bottles of all shapes and sizes, containing fluids of various colors.

"It 's near the end, next to the sarsaparilla," she said as Obadiah reached up, groping for the bottle to which she pointed. "The tall one with the rubber cork. Why don't you take some of that iron tonic the peddler sold me

last spring, if you want to get braced up? Sid Brown don't know anythin' about medicines. I don't like to have you takin' hoss medicine in your stummick. Hosses ain't the same as humans any more inside than out."

Obadiah came out bearing the bottle, and said to Marilla, in explanation of his wife's doubts, "Emma ain't got no use for Sid sence he give me a liniment the time I fell off the ladder and broke my back."

At Marilla's exclamation of consternation, "Your back!" he hastened to add, "Wan't hurt to last. You see, the fall did n't break the pith of my backbone. Sid was helpin' me shingle the barn at the time, and he give me a liniment that blistered me somethin' awful. I was weeks before I could put my clothes on. But it must of drawed off the poison, for I never had a backache sence."

He had read the directions on the bottle and, disregarding his wife's anxious protests, poured out a tablespoon of the dark brown liquid and gulped it down. He made a wry face as he finished, and hastily pumping some water into a cup gulped it down likewise.

"Try some," he said to Marilla, holding out the bottle. "Teachers can't afford to be sick."

Marilla declined with thanks, and slipped away with a word about some work she had to do.

"If your room 's cold, come back and I 'll promise not to talk you to death," Obadiah called jovially after her, as he put on his cap and started for the barn to do his chores.

But Marilla had no idea of coming back. She wanted to be alone. What must her friend of the few brief meetings think of her silence and indifference to his sufferings? Not a word from her all these weeks, after the promise of a continuing friendship. Probably, in his weakness and delirium, he had ceased to be interested in the schoolteacher who might well have passed completely from his

mind. Marilla tasted the bitterness of these thoughts, but in her unaccepting heart she remembered words and looks which were surely not those of a man who idly asks for friendship and quickly forgets.

How ungenerously she had been misjudging him, while he lay helpless and unconscious! Was there any way in which she could bring to him her compunction and her sympathy? Her mind ran over a hundred possibilities and rejected them all. She must wait until he came to her of his own accord. The conventions of life forbade anything else. In spite of her pangs of self-reproach, she was grateful for a respite. She dreaded to assume what might not be, or to voice emotions which would perhaps prove unreal when the test came. Let her wait for the day when he could come and ask her to tell him what lay hidden in her heart!

As she sat in her dark room shivering but unmindful of the cold, the sick man, delirious and helplessly dependent, took a new place in her imagination. Other women might love the man who could care for them and protect them from menace. Her heart went out to the one who could pillow his weakness on her strength. In her thoughts she implored his forgiveness for the hardness of her heart. The image she carried into her restless sleep was not that of a strong man who had led the way down the mountain a few weeks before, but of a fevered and tossing invalid, crying out to a tenderness that yearned to give and still could not give enough.

During the night the wind rose and tore at the windows. The snow swirled round the building and drifted in under the doorsills and between the window sashes. The heavy hand-hewn beams of the old farmhouse held the walls firm, but the roar of the wind round the corners was like the sound of distant cries and of low voices of suffering. Marilla slept and waked, and in her

half-waking state sat up, thinking she heard someone call her name. Each time she sank back and closed her eyes, quieted by the illusion that she was sheltering something dear and helpless in the warm circle of her arms.

## CHAPTER XII

Two more weeks passed for Marilla without a word from Seth. Through questions guardedly asked, she learned from the children that the owner of the mill was much better; that he was at the mill for half a day; then, for the whole day. After that she ceased asking and waited in mingled hope and fear for the sound of an automobile stopping at her door.

The first Saturday in December was cold and overcast. Dark, blanketing clouds on the horizon carried threat of snow, and the hens that ventured out to scratch in the manure pile did not stray far from their warm house. The snow on the ground was covered with the hard crust of an early thawing followed by freezing, and gave back a gray shine to the heavens where the glaze was smooth and a mottled whiteness where the surface had roughened.

Marilla had been busy all the morning reading the history of Poland. Something one of the children had said about Casimir the Great made her realize her abysmal ignorance, and she had written to her professor of history at the normal school, asking him to send her some books that would help her to understand the past of that spirited and unfortunate people.

She was deep in the story of the uniting of the kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania by the marriage of Jadwiga and Jagiello, when her heart contracted at the sound of an automobile, coming down the road from the direction of Lovell. She had heard several go by, running easily and rapidly on the well-packed surface of snow, but this one seemed to be slowing down as it neared the house. When the engine abruptly stopped, she lifted her head from her book, hardly daring to breathe, her own heartbeats smothering her. There was a step on the

side porch and a knock. Mrs. Rogers opened the door and she could hear someone ask for her. She had not heard that voice for six long weeks, but there was no mistaking it. She closed her book and waited, rigid with expectation. Mrs. Rogers came down the hall, tapped on her door and opened it slightly, careful to admit no more chill air from the cold passageway than was necessary.

"Mr. Walton's here. Wants to speak to you a minute," she said, putting her head in as she spoke and quickly withdrawing it. Marilla sat without moving for a moment. She could hear Mrs. Rogers return to the kitchen and the murmur of voices begin again. She suddenly jumped to her feet, dropping the book unnoticed on the floor as she did so, and ran to the mirror. As she scanned her face intently, she was too agitated, too conscious of her own emotion, to remember Ewa, leaning across the bureau under her censuring eye, with the same probing and anxious expression. She loosened the hair about her face a little, straightened her collar, and, turning from the glass with a critical and dissatisfied air, followed Mrs. Rogers down the hall.

Seth, pale and much thinner than when she had seen him last, stood near where he had entered. He was listening to Mrs. Rogers' detailed discussion of the weather of the past week, but his eyes were riveted to the door through which Marilla must come. When she appeared, the expression on his face so markedly changed that even Mrs. Rogers, to whom faces were of little interest, was startled. She thought to herself, "I wonder if he's struck on the school-teacher! He, an old batch, and she, an old maid!" She felt instant disapproval and listened severely to what they might have to say to each other.

"I've been sick," began Seth, after a perfunctory handshake under Mrs. Rogers' unwavering eye, "but the doctor tells me it would do me good to get out and exercise

a little in the fresh air. I 'm starting for a tramp in the Hermit Woods and I thought, if you have n't seen them yet, you might like to go, too."

Marilla murmured a hasty word of sympathy for his illness and answered that she would be glad to go. Would he sit down a moment, while she got ready? She would not be long. She hurried to her room, not daring to think. With feverish haste she put on a short skirt and coat and snatched up a scarlet cap and scarf. Her feet she slipped into high overshoes, fastening the snaps with hands that trembled. She returned to the kitchen in a very few minutes, pulling on her heavy gloves as she came.

Mrs. Rogers had her eyes on Seth's face when Marilla returned and she saw again the same startling change of expression. She tightened her lips, as though with difficulty restraining herself from speech. When they were gone, she spent the morning going over the possibilities such a situation suggested, hoping that Obadiah would come back early from chopping in the woods so that she might tell him her suspicions.

Seth led the way to the car. He carefully opened the door for Marilla and said, as he helped her in, "We had better ride part of the way," adding reassuringly, "You won't mind that, I know, because the last word you said to me before I was sick was that you would like a little of both walking and riding."

Marilla smiled at that and her self-possession, which had been a little shaken, returned to her.

"What a wonderful memory you have," she said, as she settled herself in the comfortable seat and watched him start the engine. "But I hope you won't remember my silence during all the weeks you 've been sick." His need of giving close attention to the car as he turned it into the shallow, frozen ruts of the road gave her courage to add, "It was n't because I was n't thinking about you."

He kept his eyes on the way ahead, but she saw a faint color rise in his cheeks as he said, decidedly, "If I 'd known that, I 'd have been well weeks sooner."

She changed the subject quickly and entertained him with the amusing ways of the Rogers and with recent incidents of her school life. Ewa was still coming every day, though she had passed her sixteenth birthday. She said no further word of Stanislaw. But she was so much cleaner than usual and paid so much attention to her dress that Marilla concluded the little god of love had not yet withdrawn his dart.

The road was quiet and deserted. They met no vehicles of any kind. The river as they crossed it lay under them white and still save where, here and there, a patch of black water, too turbulent for the slow action of the frost, curled and fretted against the encroaching ice. The snowplough had gone over the road since the last storm, and for two miles along the base of the mountain the way was clear. They could trace, on the slopes above, the road to the Sanborn farm which they had climbed in October. Then suddenly round a bend they came to the end of the cleared way. The smooth surface ahead was broken only by such parallel lines as sleigh runners cut and by gouged circles where horses' hoofs had dug up chunks of snow and tossed them untidily aside.

"The next township," commented Seth, briefly. "Not yet converted to the idea of clearing the road. We could ride a little further," he added, drawing the car up at the side, "but I 'm afraid the snow may be drifted deep in the woods. If you don't mind, I think we 'd better walk from here."

Marilla assented and they left the car. They walked down the road for a few hundred feet, and then at Seth's leading turned off where a depression in the snow showed there was a trodden path under the last light flurry of

snow. Nothing but an occasional rabbit track crossed its white surface, and the tangle of bushes that must have hemmed it in during the summer now lay leafless and unobstructive, inviting the passer-by to wander through the woods in any direction. Seth, however, kept a sharp eye on the indications of the path as they went deeper into the woods. He knew it is all too easy even for the experienced woodsman to be confident that he is following a straight line when he is really completing a circle.

"These are the woods where the hermit lives. Do you remember, I pointed him out to you, behind his old horse, the day we went to Jim Sanborn's?" asked Seth. "He's the last survivor of the Lovejoys, who came to Lovell when the wolves and Indians were something to be afraid of. The only creatures left for poor old Abel to fear are human beings. He's certainly afraid of them! That's why he's built a cabin in these woods, all that's left to him from the square mile his ancestors owned."

"The trees must be some consolation to him," said Marilla, looking at a great hemlock beside the path, whose lower branches were weighted to the ground. "If he's all desolate and full of fears inside, it must help him to see such beauty outside."

"If he only knew it was beauty!" said Seth, shaking his head as he smiled down at her. "But I suspect he thinks of trees as firewood or lumber."

"Do you suppose we could call on him?" asked Marilla, full of curiosity. "I've read of hermits who were religious fanatics or tragic victims of romance, but I never thought I'd have a chance to see one."

"I'm afraid you'd find this one nothing but a dirty old man impossible as a hero of romance," laughed Seth. "The name 'hermit' is the only romantic thing about Abel Lovejoy and I don't know whoever was inspired to give him that title."

"His own name is tragic enough," said Marilla. "Abel Lovejoy! Think of a misanthrope with a name like a line of poetry!"

Marilla was trailing a stick beside her through the snow, her eyes on the wavy graceful line it cut in the smooth white, and did not see the look on Seth's face as she spoke.

"What delightful ideas you have!" he burst out. "You are full of surprises. Talking with you is a real adventure."

She looked up with frank pleasure in her face which even consciousness of his turbulent expression did not alter.

"Do you think so?" she said, with a smile. "How nice, for I feel the same way about talking with you. I get tired of hearing nothing but the unusualness of the weather and the cantankerousness of the hens from Mrs. Rogers." As he did not speak, she went on hastily, to cover his continuing silence, "But I must admit, I do enjoy Mr. Rogers. Why is it men are so much more interesting than women, and have so many more ideas? He has ten times the brains his wife has."

"The feminists would deal harshly with you if they should hear that," he answered, smiling.

They were following the path into a little valley at the bottom of which the snow-covered stream showed a little open water where it ran close to a great rock. A transparent circle of ice, sending out tiny threads of freezing toward the centre, edged the water like the glittering frame of a dark jewel.

"Don't you think that's a rather large and dangerous generalization?" he continued, as they stopped a moment to look at the rapidly flowing water, which was emerging in agitation from beneath its white roof only to disappear immediately in silence again.

"Generalizations are always dangerous, and for that reason delicious!" she said provocatively, as they walked up the other side of the hollow. She exclaimed at the sight of a rough shack, such as woodchoppers build for temporary use, standing some distance away under a tall tree.

"Is that the hermit's home?" she asked, full of interest and curiosity.

"Yes," answered Seth. "It's nearer than I had remembered. And there's the hero of romance, himself!"

He pointed to a figure, so bent that its outline was like a dark question mark against the snow, hurrying into the house.

"He must have seen us and is going into hiding," suggested Seth. "Not very flattering to us, but entirely in character. You certainly would not have wanted a hermit to come out and welcome you with hand outstretched!"

Marilla laughed at that, and they had a sudden warm sense of sharing the gayety of life.

"Shall we ask him to let us in, or had we better just look around and go away?" queried Marilla.

"Which would you prefer?" replied Seth, looking interrogatively at her radiant face, framed by the scarlet scarf.

"I'd like to see how he lives," declared Marilla frankly.

They walked to the shanty and knocked at the door, but there was neither stir nor sound within. A ragged piece of cloth was hung over the single window. Marilla chanced to notice that it was still moving, as though just that moment dropped into place. They could see pale wisps of smoke curling from the top of the old stovepipe, which came out from the thin side wall and was guyed to the peak of the shack by rusting wires. The tar-paper sheathing of the cabin, fastened over the boards by irregularly-spaced laths, was rolling up where the

weathering had loosened it, leaving wide cracks open to the entrance of blasts from the north.

"I don't suppose we can break in," said Marilla, in a smiling whisper, when they had waited a little time after a second vigorous knock. "A hermit's home is his castle."

They walked round the house to a second smaller shack the door of which was carefully padlocked. In the snow beside it stood an ancient buggy, the shafts mended with rope and the wheels tilting at various angles. From inside the building they could hear the champing of jaws.

"It must be the horse we saw him driving," said Marilla, with another smiling glance at Seth. "His master is evidently not starving him."

"The poor beast 's probably eating his manger. Wait till spring," warned Seth. "I wager he 'll be skin and bone by then."

A short distance from the shed was a curving mound of stacked cordwood lying coiled in the clearing like a resting snake.

"He sells wood, now and then," remarked Seth. "Probably he gets what little money he has that way."

They stood a moment, looking back at the silent shack.

"I certainly saw that curtain stir again," declared Marilla. "He must be spying on us."

"He may think we are spying on him," rejoined Seth.

"It gives me an eerie feeling, somehow," said Marilla. "Let 's go."

They went back along the path, like searchers hurrying to find lost ways of tranquil normal living, moving close beside each other as if human fellowship protected them from painful thoughts of the warped being in the weather-beaten shack behind them. For a time neither spoke. Then Marilla said, as though definitely shaking herself free from the burden of memory, "How thankful we ought to be to feel the zest of living and to love our

own kind! That poor creature has missed everything that makes a man different from a mollusk."

"I don't believe Abel is so entirely different from the rest of us New Englanders. There 's shrinking and self-consciousness in all of us that 's only different in quantity from the fears that drive him into the woods. Probably it was never very strong in you, but until the War I was so shut up in myself and so unwilling to meet any people except those I had to see in my business that I was a real hermit at heart."

Marilla, walking ahead, waited for his next words.

"The War shook me out of myself, as it did a lot of men I knew. I began to find people enormously interesting. The thought of shutting myself away from them did n't seem attractive any more, though I confess it was n't until I met you that I realized how much more fun it is to share ideas than to try to think things out for oneself."

Marilla felt a confusion which mortified her, for his manner was most quiet and matter-of-fact. She managed to stammer, "I 've been finding that out, too, though I 've been more fortunate than you in being so much with children that I 've had to act like a social being."

Marilla had been unconsciously hurrying a little, for tiny flakes of snow had begun to fall and she could feel a rising wind stirring the pine above her head. She increased her speed as she spoke. Seth did not answer her and seemed to lag behind. Marilla, turning to see why he was not following, saw him steadying himself against a tree, his face suddenly white. She ran to him.

"Is something the matter?" she asked, her heart beating fast with alarm.

He managed to say a word of reassurance, though his look was ghastly.

"It 's the old flu, I 'm afraid," he said, faintly. "I

thought I was stronger than I am. I must n't walk quite so fast."

Marilla felt a rush of tenderness that almost overwhelmed her. He had urgent need of her at last. She alone of all the world was here to guide him through the snow-shrouded woods.

"How thoughtless I 've been!" she cried, seizing his arm. "You must let me help you."

"Oh, no," he said, in quick refusal, holding himself erect with an effort and starting slowly down the path. "I 'm all right now."

They walked along for a time, Marilla's watchful eye upon him. Then he swayed a moment and she caught his arm again.

"It 's this hateful dizziness I 've had ever since the attack," he said, putting his hand to his head. "My legs are strong enough, but my head is weak."

He waited a minute, trying to steady his swimming vision, while Marilla stood beside him without a word. He looked down at her with an expression of deep distress.

"Fine kind of man I am, to take you walking and then have to ask your help to get me home!"

She could not trust herself to answer him. Waves of emotion were sweeping over her, drowning her reluctance and repulsions in a mounting tide of tenderness. She looked up at him with an anxiety she made no effort to conceal.

"If you would put your arm across my shoulder, I 'm sure you could walk to the car without trouble," she said, pleadingly.

He might not have yielded, even to such solicitude, had not his dizziness been beyond his control. He could not guide himself with any certainty and he was forced to acquiesce. They started along the path, his arm resting on her shoulder and her steadying arm around him.

"How fortunate that we are nearly back on the road," she said cheerfully, as they walked along. She tried to follow their earlier tracks, which were still visible though fast filling with the fresh snow. "We shall soon be there, now."

But the distance was longer than she had remembered. Several times Seth was forced to halt and lean against a tree until the woods should stop rocking in front of him. His arm rested more heavily on Marilla's shoulder, and they both fell silent as though instinctively saving their strength for possible need. The snow shut them in like a perpetually raveled and rewoven curtain swayed hither and thither by the fitful wind. The tracks under their feet were faint depressions in the white, occasionally obscured when a snow-laden gust leveled the uneven surface ahead of them.

As Marilla bent down to make sure of a footprint, Seth said with a little smile, "You must n't be frightened, Miss Lamprey. My brain 's all right. I could find our way without depending on our tracks in the snow."

Marilla looked up with an attempt at a responsive smile, but, instead, searched his pale face with an anxious look.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked, as he stood for a moment in front of her.

"Yes," he answered, his eyes on hers, "but not quite ready to give up my prop."

They started on again, his arm across her shoulder. She lifted her gloved hand to hold his and to reassure herself that he would not fall. They were alone in the white world, experiencing an intensity of comradeship which weeks of ordinary living could not have given. To Marilla each moment was full of happiness. This man from whom she had shrunk when he was vigorous and well had power in his weakness to draw her unresisting to him. His dependence on her woman's care roused in

her slumbering passions she did not know she possessed. She marveled that she had ever turned aside from his glance or tried to guide his words of emotion into the safe channels of convention.

The snow whirled round them, driving against their cheeks in little stinging clouds, one moment tossing the end of her scarf behind her and the next flinging it against his leather coat. The woods gradually became more open and, though they had some time since lost sight of their tracks in the snow, Seth felt sure of his direction.

They came out into an open space. Seth staggered a little as the wind blew with sudden strength.

"Is n't this the road?" he asked, looking around, bewildered.

Marilla saw a clear swath running between the trees, unmistakably the road, though all marks underfoot were lost in the drifting snow.

"Yes," she cried, joyfully. "Now we are safe."

They turned to the right and walked round the bend. There, not far away, was the car. The snow lay on the running boards, but was whipped from the top in little clouds by the wind.

Marilla looked up at Seth, as he towered above her. "I feel as if we had escaped something!" she said, with a little sigh of relief.

A strong gust of wind, sweeping down the road, threw her lightly against his shoulder.

"And have n't we found something, too?" he asked, in a whisper, his cheek on her little snow-covered cap.

Marilla had a moment's shrinking, a recurrence of her old fear of an overpowering emotion that should rob her of herself. She stood trembling in the close shelter of his arm. Then, suddenly engulfed in great waves of feeling, ready to throw herself blindly on the breast of nature and trust a wisdom older than human experience,

she lifted her face to his. The touch of his lips, warm in the prevailing chill, startled her. She hesitated and half withdrew, when, softer than the snow that was falling about her, she seemed to feel the clinging of tiny hands and to hear, carried on the wind, the sweetness of children's voices. Her heart expanded with rapture. The passion of her inner life forced its way to the surface as she clung to him and cried, "Dearest, dearest! I have been waiting and longing for you all my life!"

# PART TWO

# CHAPTER I

THE first year of his marriage was a time of great anxiety for Seth in the conduct of his business. The period following the War had seen a slump in the wool market; new fashions, new inventions, and new materials had unsettled the production of the staple woolen goods and the New England manufacturers were bewildered and uncertain as to what the future held for them. The increasing use of cotton and silk to dilute the wool, and the growing admixture of shoddy, the Renaissance wool of the French, which reduced the cost, made it difficult for the pure-wool cloth, which it had been the pride of the Waltons to produce since the mill was established in 1830, to find an adequate market.

The problem of adjustment to changing conditions was not new to the industry, nor to the Waltons. In 1880 Seth's father had been a pioneer in the manufacture of Henrietta cloth, a soft dress goods new to the country. He was encouraged to the venture by the abundant supply of high-grade wool in New Hampshire and Vermont which was peculiarly adapted to such use.

The Walton wagons had traveled over the rough roads of the northern country wherever the best wool was to be found. A special price was offered for the cleanest fleeces and the farmers were encouraged to keep their sheep out of the pastures where burrs and briers clung to the wool and made its cleansing difficult. From farm to farm the wagons went, buying the spring clip, weighing it on the portable scale which swung from the back axle, and piling the dingy fleeces high above the heads of the drivers. The big canvas, holding the wool in place, gave the slow-moving wagons the appearance of their sister craft, the prairie schooners, which were even then making their final trips across the Western plains. Seth's father

as a boy went with the wagons, carrying bolts of the new Henrietta cloth to show the farmers what was being made from their wool, and, when he could, trading cloth instead of bills of exchange for the fleeces. The farmers' wives, waiting eagerly for the annual coming of the buyers, usually managed to get a few yards of the soft fabric that made so much prettier dresses than the coarse cloth spun at home or the cheap satinet with its cotton warp which they bought at the local store.

Seth pondered over his problem in the light of the past. Generations of dealing with the raw materials, the machinery, the dyes, and the workers in his industry had built up a competence which was the most important capital the mill in the little town could have. But it was an ability that was not adapted to large-scale production. He was convinced that he must cling to quality rather than try for quantity. He could think of no other basis on which New Hampshire could continue as a manufacturing state or his mill in Lovell survive.

"I know how to weave. I ought to understand it, with three generations of experience to draw on," he said to Marilla one Sunday when they were off on a long tramp over the hills, "but I 've got to forestall the fluctuations of fashion. Women are not interested any more in cloth that will wear, which is what our mill 's been famous for. They want something that will please the eye."

"You old Puritan!" laughed Marilla. "I suppose you think that 's wicked. Why is n't it good ethics as well as good business to give people what they want. You can't force all-wool-and-a-yard-wide on a reluctant woman who wants to be beautiful in a dress goods that 's animal, mineral, and vegetable combined, with a pattern that shows all three to advantage."

Seth's furrowed brow smoothed.

"You 're a good antidote to me, Marilla. You ought

to be my business partner." He smiled at her, but she shook her head doubtfully. "The trouble with me is," he went on, "that I hate to give up making cloth that 's known through the trade as the finest quality woven in this country and compete with faked material."

"I believe you 're sentimental about your business traditions," teased Marilla. "You can't laugh at me any more for being so downcast over my abandoned farms."

Seth looked at her with that intimate tenderness of expression of married lovers which needs no words, and went on, as if he had answered her, "I can remember as a boy being impressed by my grandfather's flat refusal to buy any wool except the highest grade, no matter how much he had to pay for it. Any farmer who raised merino sheep, which were new in this State in his day, knew that the Lovell mill would buy every fleece at a good price."

They were walking on the side of Wild Cat Mountain where Jeremiah Stickney had lived in the time when the farms in New Hampshire prospered and he was reputed the richest man in the township. As they wandered across the overgrown fields Seth told Marilla the story of Jeremiah's venture in the early days. Like other settlers, he had seen that the pasturage was good for sheep, and had a large flock feeding on the hills, but he had observed, what the others failed to notice, that the breed was poor. He was not satisfied, as were his neighbors, to go on raising inferior animals. He was constantly searching for good rams and trying to improve his stock. In 1810 he heard rumors of the sheep which the American consul at Lisbon was shipping to the United States in occasional sailing vessels during the summer and fall of that year. Some enterprising Vermont breeders had bought a few of them and were extravagant in their praise. The animals were the famous Spanish merinos which were pastured in

the valleys of the Estremadura during the winter and in the spring driven a hundred miles across the wide plains to their summer pastures in the mountains. They had developed a wool whose length and beauty made them the most jealously guarded treasure of Spain. Their export was forbidden and only rare gifts from king to king had given the outer world a glimpse of the golden fleece of Iberia. But it was not possible to safeguard them forever. War between France and Spain, the seizure by the Spanish Junta of some of the choicest flocks in the country, owned by Spanish grandees who had taken sides with France, gave the long-awaited opportunity. The Junta, in need of money, smuggled the sheep into Portugal and there sold them to the highest bidders. Many went to England, but the farsighted American consul purchased several thousand and sent them to America. As one square-rigged sailing vessel after another, laden with the unfamiliar animals, came into the Atlantic ports the interest increased. In the spring of 1811 the keen-faced farmer on Wild Cat Mountain had made up his mind. He went to Boston in an oxcart, carrying with him all the money he had in the world. He returned with a ram and two ewes which were to alter the breed of a whole countryside.

"In time there was so much wool and such good wool raised in the neighborhood," Seth explained, "that my great-grandfather was encouraged to start a little mill to weave for those who had no looms. From that tiny beginning, the big mill has grown. He had the great advantage of buying his wool near at hand, and of washing it in clear water flowing over granite where it could not pick up mineral or chemical impurities. We still have the water and that 's a help, but the wool 's gone."

"What a break with the past when the Stickney place was auctioned! I can see why those old women hated to

leave a country which their grandfather had done so much to build up!" exclaimed Marilla, seeing as though it were yesterday the tragic face at the window above the auctioneer.

"It really was n't a break for them," answered Seth. "When their brothers went West they took with them what were left of the original Guadalupe merinos. They have a prize flock in Wisconsin now and exhibit every year at the State fair. Those women are enjoying sheep again after seeing nothing but empty pastures for years."

Marilla idly wondered if the sight of sheep would compensate them for being uprooted when they were too old to welcome change, but she saved her breath for the sharp climb ahead of them. They came out on a ledge from which they could see the roof of the mill far down the valley.

"The sheep ought to come back to these hills," said Seth, meditatively. "Perhaps the abandonment of the farms is the necessary preliminary. We 'll be wild frontier country round here before long, and then it 'll pay to raise wool."

Marilla followed his look and for the moment shared with him both his anxieties and his hopes. She had found admission to the problems and perplexities of a business man's life a new and absorbing experience. She had sympathized with Seth in his difficulties and had encouraged him in his experiments when his own more cautious nature might have hesitated. To Seth the first year of marriage had been a time of great personal happiness which was not affected by the uncertainty in the manufacturing world. He had a companion to whom he could speak his inmost thoughts freely and with whom he could share the little happenings which form so large a part of the substance of life. He left in the morning full of energy for the work of the day and returned at night with

the eager step of one certain of fond welcome. The two walked and talked, rode and rested, in a happy tête-à-tête that seemed to leave no want unsatisfied.

Marilla had taken her place as mistress of the old house with the keenest pleasure. The family homestead waked to a new life with her coming. The curtains at the windows were pushed far apart and the sunlight allowed to pour in on the mahogany furniture and bring out the richness of color acquired from generations of polishing housekeepers. The full lustre of pewter brightened the corner cupboards; and the small bookcase, large enough for the library of an earlier day, began to overflow with the books Marilla accumulated. The straight-backed chairs were no longer pushed against the wall, but pulled into groupings round the fireplace, and the big living room quickly achieved the look of generous and happy hospitality.

Marilla loved everything about the house. The paneled walls, the quaint dormers, the wide floor-boards, the white wooden shutters, were all dear to her. The fruit closet where apples could be stored for the winter, the screened food cage, the cool cupboard with shelves for pickles and preserves, filled her with delight. She wondered how she would ever put up enough food to occupy such ample spaces and how she and Seth could ever eat enough to empty the shelves again. She had smiled happily to herself. "I 'll spend the summer stocking up on jellies and compotes and we 'll call in our friends through the winter to help us eat them."

The attic had been a special joy, stored as it was with the accumulation of a hundred years. Superfluous chairs, extra bureaus, wobbly-legged tables, unused trunks, feather beds, piles of patchwork quilts, old books and magazines, were neatly arranged round the big central chimney and pushed under the sloping eaves. Each

visit of inspection revealed new and hitherto unsuspected treasure: old china or pewter, ornaments and utensils of needs that were past, quaint embroideries and books. She reveled in the musty smell of ancient hidings in the dark corners. When she was able to repair or re-use a discarded possession, she was particularly happy. One day she found, tucked behind an old feather bed, a mahogany rocking cradle, dusty and well-worn but still staunch and unbroken. She gave a little startled exclamation and looked at it with a half-smile on her face, but she made no move to touch it. After a few moments she set the feather bed back in place and went quietly away.

In those early months the house was full of Seth's old friends and Marilla's new ones and echoed to a gayety which it had perhaps never known before. Seth expanded in the atmosphere of hospitality and developed a new capacity for enjoyment and a fresh social ease. Marilla was a spirited hostess and both she and Seth seemed to grow younger as the weeks passed.

Then little by little there came a change. Marilla began to have times of sudden depression from which she could with difficulty rouse herself. Each attack left her a little quieter, slower to respond to the challenge of happiness, less eager to share her life with others, more ready to be alone. Seth watched her in troubled silence. She was like a bright luminary suffering an eclipse. He tried to wait in patience for the darkness to pass, surrounding her with a sensitive affection which respected her reserve yet was always tender and solicitous. But she sobered more rapidly than the passage of time would warrant. There were moments when her response had all the old vividness, but they were infrequent. She smiled, but the gayety was gone from her expression and her old energy was mysteriously dying down.

The second winter of her marriage her interest in Seth's

mounting perplexities became spasmodic and no enthusiasm seemed able to hold her for long. At first her friends wondered and protested, but gradually they accepted the changed Marilla as though the other had never been. Meanwhile the young wife, like a creature fearful of observation, busied herself with futilities that kept her from intimate human contacts, and with restless activities that seemed to have little necessity or meaning.

During the later months of the winter Seth was busy with plans for an addition to the weaving room at the mill and could forget his anxiety through the active hours of the day. But he no longer opened the door of his home with the old confident feeling that his touch on the latch was being awaited with unmixed joy. He had learned that he must take his mood fresh each night from the dark-haired woman with the shadowed eyes who welcomed him in the little hallway. He had moments of suffering the pangs of emotional loneliness even with the touch of her lips on his, but he tried to forget them in the happier hours when the old radiant Marilla emerged for the moment from the cloud in which she seemed to be more and more passing her days.

## CHAPTER II

One morning in April, Marilla was dusting the furniture in her parlor. The fragrant, earthy air, blown in across the elm-edged lawn, brought the familiar promise of emergent spring. Marilla, like other sentient beings when played upon by its subtle forces, unconsciously responded to the challenge of recurring life. She kept stopping to lean from the window, breathing in the perfumed currents, or to look idly out, not with the manner of whole-hearted expectation, but as if from an acquired habit of watching nature's changes.

The flash of a bird's wing in the sunlight caught her flagging attention. She tossed aside her dust cloth and ran out of the front door. The straggling lilac bushes, tall and untrimmed, which sheltered the house from the street, were for the moment in the possession of a flock of migrating birds who were twittering and fluttering in the bare twigs, flying up and alighting again, eager and full of life. Marilla watched them, fascinated by their energy and life. Suddenly as though in response to an invisible signal they darted out of the bushes and away in a tumult of moving color like gust-blown autumn leaves.

Marilla tested the lilac buds gently between her fingers, sensing their resistance to her touch as the pressure of emerging life that will not be denied. The lilacs held a special place in her imagination. They symbolized to her the generations of Waltons who had planted and tended the bushes for over a hundred years. She replaced dead roots and encouraged the older shoots to spread as though she were obeying the behest of flower lovers long dead and gone. The phantom figures of those wives of the Waltons, clad in the drab satinet of the early days of the mill, seemed to her fancy to wander across the lawn on

nights when the lilacs were in bloom and the air sweet with fragrance. She did not want to be the first woman in the family who had failed to maintain the ancient tradition of lilacs blossoming in the front yard. Those mothers and grandmothers had reproaches enough for her without that.

Marilla lingered at the gate, her face paler than usual and dark circles under her eyes. Listlessly she watched a neighbor's cat stalking an apparently heedless robin which was crossing the yard in short runs, tilting its head daintily as though listening for worms. When the cat, moving along the grass like smooth-flowing water, had come close, he made a sudden leap, but in vain. A quick flutter of wings and the robin was unconcernedly preening its feathers on the branch of a tree, while its discomfited pursuer with an air of pretended indifference withdrew to the back of the house.

Marilla had started to follow the cat to the side door when she heard an automobile horn blown sharply behind her. She turned to see Amelia in her neat uniform driving the car she used on her rural visits. Marilla waved a greeting to her, but the car instead of passing came to a stop by the gate.

"It 's such a glorious morning," called Amelia. "Can't you make the rounds with me?"

Marilla hesitated. The bright world invited. Why not go and forget sad thoughts? But there was Seth's dinner to be prepared and the polishing of the table silver. She shook her head as though rebuking herself and answered, "Of course I 'll come. Shall I put up a lunch?"

"Yes," said Amelia. "We 'll be gone most of the day. I have a call to make on this street. I 'll be back for you in fifteen minutes."

Marilla hurried in to leave a note for the elderly widow who consented as a favor to work for her part of every

day. She scribbled directions about Seth's dinner and the upstairs closets which should be cleaned. Her brow furrowed a little as she remembered her plan of helping with the metal polishing and getting the dining-room cupboard in perfect order, but she picked up her lunch and latched the door conscious of a determination not to think of the tasks she had left undone.

"Do you know, Amelia," she said, as she took her place in the car, "two years of married life are making me into the typical New England housekeeper I 've always denounced and declared I 'd never be!" She smiled a little ruefully as she spoke.

"There might be worse things!" said Amelia, smiling in return, rejoicing at the momentary air of animation and interest. She turned the car north.

"I 'm not so sure," answered Marilla with a shake of the head. "Just wait for the time when I 'll forget to welcome you and look instead for the dirt you are tracking in on your feet! When I was keeping house for my father, I was so busy teaching and running the farm that I had no time for housekeeping. My only idea was to get it done quickly. Now that I have time, the terrible passion for cleanliness is getting me. You know when the Mayflower let down its anchor in Provincetown harbor all the women rushed on shore to do their washing. Their Puritan daughters have been at the job ever since. In our secret hearts we all expect to get into Heaven by showing Saint Peter the callous spots on our knuckles."

Amelia was sometimes a little shocked at Marilla's way of putting things. She nodded in answer, but she secretly hoped that Marilla would not joke that way about Saint Peter with everyone. People look at such matters differently and there 's no use in hurting anyone's feelings.

At their first stop, before a house not far from the Rogers' farm, Amelia said as she got out with her bag

in her hand, "I think you 'd better not come in. They 're queer, sensitive people and they might think you were prying."

Marilla was perfectly content to sit in the car. She watched Amelia, as she disappeared into the house, with a glow of affection and admiration. She was very fond of her sister-in-law and had wanted her to live with them after she and Seth were married, but Amelia, with the wisdom born of familiarity with many homes, preferred to live alone. She had a room not far from the old house and ran in often to share the humors and trials of a nurse's life with her brother and his wife, but she kept her independence.

The pines on the hills across the river were penciled with delicate strokes of white where the trunks of the birches, bare of masking leaves, stood out against the dark background of the evergreens. Marilla, her eyes absorbed by the distant beauty, was startled by hearing in the apple orchard near by the brave little run of the robin's song, so dear and familiar a prelude to the opening of spring in New Hampshire. Below the road the Little River, flushed with melted snow from the woods that covered its watershed, ran noisily on its way. Marilla could catch a glimpse of an upsurge of its current, continually thrusting against a rock in the middle of the river bed which seemed to deny it passageway. The mass of the water went over the obstacle in a white foaming rush, but a little flow, constant and unchanging, poured back over the surface of the advancing wave. Marilla watched it, fascinated, feeling the charmed quiet that comes to human beings in contemplation of the ceaseless energy of nature.

After a time she looked back at the house, her mind full of memories of her early days in Lovell. She remembered the two who had lived there the year she passed

by daily on her way to school — a heavy silent man wearing a large seal ring on a hand which was never darkened with the soil of farming, and his pale second wife who would make no friends with the neighbors. The farmers gossiped and conjectured as to how the man made his living, but Marilla had paid little attention to him. From the first her interest had been absorbed in the wife. What thoughts were brooding behind that unsmiling face? What past dogged her languid steps as she moved from house to barn and back again? This morning Marilla wondered afresh over the vanished pair. The unlifting shadow on the woman's face must have had some cause. Marilla remembered the haunting expression of her eyes. Had marriage held miseries for her repressed and shrinking womanhood against which her whole nature had rebelled and to which she could never reconcile herself?

Amelia's cheerful voice at the door, giving final directions to a slatternly woman behind her, brought her to herself. She sat up straight, feeling an obscure shame, in the presence of Amelia's optimism and energy, at harboring depression.

"Difficult people," observed Amelia, as they drove off. "The child has a tubercular sore on her leg. They 're willing to have me come every day and dress the sore, but they pay no attention to the doctor's and my directions about food and sunshine. I 've a strong suspicion that they 've called in an old woman who lives back in the hills and claims to cure disease with an herb remedy she learned from her Indian grandmother."

"Two hundred years ago she 'd have been hung for a witch," suggested Marilla.

"More 'n likely she 'd have been welcomed as the healer of the whole countryside," answered Amelia with a grim smile. "If it were n't for a few really serious diseases,

I would n't object to these fake doctors. If there 's nothing much the matter with you, they 're harmless. Most troubles cure themselves, anyway. But the quacks don't know what 's serious and what 's not. Their victims lose precious time fooling with ignorance. The other day one of my patients, who might have got well, died of consumption because she spent five months in a closed house taking 'Western Fresh Air Pills' when she could have been saved by the fresh air just outside her own window. Lots of people on these farms are needlessly crippled and only half alive because they 've depended on Indian Winnie and her kind to cure them."

"She can't compete with you in the long run," said Marilla, admiringly. "These New England women like cleanliness and order."

"You 'd think so, would n't you?" answered Amelia, adding with emphasis, "But they think Winnie's dirt is a sign of occult power which a nurse in a uniform could n't have."

In passing they stopped for a word with Mrs. Rogers, whom Marilla saw fairly often. She thought her old friend looked thinner and paler than usual, but Mrs. Rogers would hear no word of being sick. She had started her spring medicine of sulphur and molasses, she said, not because she was ailing, but to help her appetite, which was never very good at this time of year.

Amelia went in and out of the houses, returning each time with a tale of illness, and often of ignorance and poverty, which made Marilla wonder if every farm in the township hid a tragedy behind its weathered walls. She forgot to count the houses which they passed without stopping, or to notice the cheery greetings waved from windows and back porches where a nurse's visit was unnecessary. She saw what by her inner mood she was prepared to see.

Amelia drove the car across the wooden bridge and up the mountain road which Marilla and Seth had followed three years before in search of a mechanic.

"Mrs. Sanborn 's helpless now and can't leave her bed," she said in explanation. "I try to go to her once a week. I give her a bath and make her as comfortable as I can. The road looks pretty soft, but I think we 'll get there." Marilla made no remark and Amelia went on, "The daughter does what she can, but she 's a sick woman herself and has her hands full trying to keep her worthless husband at work. Jim 's a great help, but a woman knows how to nurse better than a man."

Marilla felt a sudden dark depression. The whole world seemed to her a sorry place. Amelia, who helped, was vigorous and full of courage, but she, who had sunk into her own life, motiveless as a stone in a pool, saw human existence for the moment as a meaningless pageant of misery.

The road was wet and miry with the last of the thawing. Through openings in the woods lovely vistas appeared, prophetic of the coming of spring. Curled fronds of ferns pushed through layers of mouldy leaves and in damp hollows skunk cabbage unfolded its vivid green.

Amelia was full of cheerful descriptions of the rag rugs Ruby was making.

"She has copied some of the old patterns beautifully. At the church fair in Epsom several of them sold for good prices. I 've got orders from the summer people at Lovell Corners for a number. The money she earns that way helps a lot. I have n't seen her for several weeks. She has n't been at home the last few times I 've been here. I hope she 'll be there to-day, for I want to give her some directions about the colors."

As the road came out of the woods they had a clear

view of the sweep of hills ahead of them. Amelia gave a quick glance around, but her attention was held by the heated engine which was straining at the grade. She kept it moving steadily up the slope and turned it into the bare yard between the house and barn. The great elm, sheltering the low roof, was a little blurred at the tips of its branches where the buds were beginning to swell, but the sun, hardly hindered by the network of interlaced twigs, shone warmly on the gray shingles of the roof and on the granite sill at the door. Amelia gave a quick knock and stepped inside, followed by Marilla. The entry was close and musty.

"Leave the door open," whispered Amelia. "Let's air it out a little while we 're here."

They had to edge their way round the door to get into the room at the right, for the stairs and the opened door occupied most of the little hall. The room they entered was the kitchen. There was a warm fire in the stove, geraniums in tin cans on the upper sill of the windows, a narrow pine tavern table, and old chairs that would have filled a collector's heart with envy set against the side walls. At one of the windows stood a comb back rocker with a faded cushion lying on the seat and another tied to the spindles of the back. It was the chair in which Marilla had seen Mrs. Sanborn sitting three years before. The thought that she might never sit in it again flashed through her mind.

As they entered, a pale woman with stooped shoulders, whose gray hair was drawn into a tight knot on the top of her head, came into the kitchen from an adjoining room. Amelia introduced her to Marilla.

"This is Mrs. Sanborn's daughter, Mrs. Fox. You know her daughter, Ruby. Where 's your father this morning, Mrs. Fox? He 's usually at the door to let me in."

"He 's busy," answered the woman briefly. Amelia was bending over her bag at the moment and did not see, as Marilla did, the flush creep over her sallow face as she spoke. She thought to herself that the father was probably doing her loafing husband's work and that she was blushing for shame.

"Well," said Amelia, cheerfully, "we can do without him as long as I 've got you and my sister-in-law. She 's a pretty good nurse, so we shall have plenty of help." She picked up her bag. "You bring the water and I 'll get everything ready."

She went into the next room and Marilla heard a thin voice answer her word of greeting. While she and Mrs. Fox were filling the basin and pitcher with warm water, they could hear the sound of the two voices in alternation, the one strong and confident, the other weak and querulous. Mrs. Fox bent to lift the heavy pitcher, but Marilla, as she noticed her difficult stooping, picked it up and carried it for her. She could not have been more than five or six years older than Marilla, yet she looked twenty. Marilla felt a sudden pity at the thought of the hard years that had so aged her, but the woman's manner invited no sympathy. Behind the ravaged mask of her face her soul seemed to have taken cognizance of its wrongs and measured its capacity to endure.

The room into which they stepped was small and dark, lighted by a tiny window through which they could see a little patch of the sunlit valley below. The only furniture was a spool bed of deep-toned walnut, a single straight-backed chair, and a pine table rich with the coloring of years but stained and marred with indifferent and careless use. The dark paper on the wall intensified the gloom. The only bright object in the room was a rag rug on the floor, as brilliant and lovely as a freshly picked bouquet of garden flowers. Marilla

stepped across it to set the pitcher beside the basin on the table. She smiled at the wizened face on the pillow.

"How lovely to have such a beautiful rug to look at!" she exclaimed. "Do you remember me, Mrs. Sanborn? I came up here with Mr. Walton before we were married. He needed your husband's help at the mill."

"I don't know as I remember your face," answered the woman, guardedly. She spoke indistinctly, as most of her teeth were gone, but she looked at Marilla intently. "I did n't know Mr. Walton was keepin' company. Jim always told me Mr. Walton had n't no use for women. Exceptin', of course, sisters," she added, with a quaint half-humorous look of apology at Amelia from eyes that seemed so strangely alive and glowing in her shriveled and pain-twisted face.

Amelia, busily taking absorbent cotton, liquid soap, powder, and other supplies from her bag and arranging them in order on the table, smiled absent-mindedly. She deftly slipped an old flannel blanket, which Mrs. Fox handed her, under the patient, moving the crippled little body with firm, gentle hands.

"There can't nobody lift me like you do," said the sick woman. "I scream right out when Ruby touches me, and 't ain't that the child don't try to be easy with me."

"She 'll learn in time," said Amelia, as she dextrously removed her patient's nightgown without disturbing her or exposing her to the chilly air. "How is she getting on with her rugs?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Sanborn, lying quiet and relaxed under the blanket while Amelia washed her softly with cotton dipped in the warm water and dried her with gentle pressures of the towel. "She don't come over much any more. What 's got into her, Mary?" she asked, turning to her daughter, who stood beside

Amelia, ready to hand her what she wanted. "She ain't mad at her old grandma'am, is she?"

Marilla noticed a quick return of the same painful flush she had seen before on Mrs. Fox's face as she answered, shortly, "No, she 's jest busy," and went out of the room as if in search of something she had forgotten. Marilla, seeing she could be of no assistance to Amelia, followed her into the kitchen. She was standing motionless at the window, staring out. As she heard steps behind her, she turned around startled, and Marilla, looking in her face, saw a starkness of misery that struck her dumb. The expression faded instantly into the unbetraying blankness of a few minutes before, but Marilla was left with the feeling that she had stumbled into the hiding place of a being frantic for concealment. The woman looked as if she were in the grip of a fate that only secrecy and silence made endurable.

Marilla, accustomed by her reserve to the surface of life in her dealings with her fellows, shrank from the unexpected menace of emotion. For a fumbling moment she had no words. She looked at the flowers in the window, pinched the leaves and smelled their fragrance, and remarked, hastily, "These seem like good strong plants. Your mother must have a knack with flowers."

Mrs. Fox's manner was more controlled than hers.

"They grow nicely in that sunny window. Mother 's always liked flowers," she said.

Just then Amelia called Mrs. Fox into the bedroom and Marilla was left alone. She sat in the sick woman's rocking-chair and looked out the window. The shed, the barn, and the field running up to the beech woods were all Mrs. Sanborn had been able to see for years. To the great sweep of the valley below and the rise of the mountains beyond, the little house had turned its back, heedless of the beauty but mindful of the cold

winter winds that blew from the north. Marilla's heart went dead within her at the thought of the circumscribed life. Did love for her husband make it bearable? Could she forget her daughter's tragedy and her grandchild's affliction and take pleasure in Ruby's rugs and in the girl's foolish vacant face? Did eating still give her reason to cling to life? Was she glad when the sun rose and when spring came? Did she dream and hope for anything except the end of pain?

The feeble voice was saying, "Tell Mis' Walton I want she should come in again."

Mrs. Sanborn, bright-eyed, was lying in a clean bed, her scant hair in a neat white braid on the pillow. Mrs. Fox had set the room in order and Amelia was just closing her bag.

"How nice you look," said Marilla, trying not to let pity master her. "Amelia knows how to make people feel comfortable."

"Yes," said the quavering voice, "she 's a real good nurse."

Her thin hands, distorted and malformed by rheumatism, lay crossed white and motionless on her breast. Her breathing hardly stirred the sheets. She might have been carved from marble for her own tomb. Nothing of her seemed to live except her eyes, which burned with a vivid flame. Mrs. Fox and Amelia left the room.

"So you 're married," went on the voice whose feebleness was so contradicted by the fire in the eyes. "Mr. Walton must be a real nice husband. I suppose you got a family by now."

Marilla paled. "No," she said. Her voice seemed suddenly to have lost its timbre. "We have no family."

The old woman looked at her fixedly.

"What 's the matter with folks nowadays, that they don't have no children? Too lazy to take care of 'em,

I suppose. In my day we did things different. Mary 's the only child I raised, but I had ten."

"That must have been terrible, to lose so many children," stammered Marilla.

"No," came the voice from the immobile figure on the bed. "In my day we did n't expect to raise all we had. When we lost one, we had another and thanked God. You better have six if you 're going to raise any. 'T ain't natural for a married woman not to have a family."

Marilla started to say something, and checked herself. There was no sympathy in the old eyes on the pillow. Why should she bare her heart to the curiosity and antagonism that spoke in every word? She tried to speak casually.

"Your daughter does n't seem to have followed your example."

The eyes dimmed as though the fire in their depths had been suddenly extinguished.

"Her husband 's a bad man. One child of his is enough. Have you ever seen Ruby?"

"Oh, yes," answered Marilla. "She was my pupil for a week in the River School."

"I hope your husband ain't got the kind of past her father had, or you 'd be glad you ain't got no children," she said. The eyes which had been fixed on Marilla closed as though shutting her out finally from the hidden life that burned behind the pale lids.

Marilla started to speak. "My husband," she said, and stopped. "I must be going," she ended, looking at the still figure as though in dread of stabbing words if the eyes should open again. But there was neither sound nor movement from the bed, and she slipped noiselessly from the room.

As they started away, Amelia called to Ruby's mother, "Tell Ruby to use that same flower design for the next

two rugs. I 'm sure I can sell them for a good price."

Mrs. Fox was standing in the shadow of the doorway as Amelia spoke. Marilla noticed on her face the same painful flush she had observed twice before that day. The treacherous body betrayed what the will was determined to conceal. What was the mystery behind the quick color and the guarded words?

## CHAPTER III

AMELIA and Marilla ate their lunch on the edge of a sunny field halfway down the mountain. They spread a rug on the grass and after they had eaten Amelia stretched herself out in the manner of one trained to snatch complete relaxation when the opportunity comes. Marilla sat at her side with a sense of haunting estrangement from what had long been intimate and beloved. It was the silent time in early April when the cows were not yet in the pasture and few birds were on the wing. Nature lay ready to spring to life at the quickening word, but had not yet heard the summons to repeat her annual miracle.

As Marilla's eyes scanned the horizon, she could see to the south a thin line of smoke over the railroad track that ran beside the river and could hear the faint distant sound of an approaching train. It reminded her of the Marilla, eager and full of hope, who had come to Lovell on that train three years ago. A woman externally like her sat heavy-eyed on the hillside. She looked unmoved at a loveliness to which three years ago she would have responded with a leaping heart.

Gradually, as she sat on the sunny slope seeing the green of the young shoots in the tangled stubble of last year's grass and the pale flush on the maple trees along the wall, the shadow on her spirit lifted. Nature wore such a gentle and smiling peace. She felt herself rebuked by beauty.

The train stopped for a few minutes at the station in Lovell. Marilla could hear the sharp puffs of its starting change to a steady rumble as it gathered speed down the grade. It moved rapidly north, the tumult of its going deepened and reënforced by reverberations within the enclosing hills. At the echoing sound Amelia sat up and

looked at the dissolving trail of white smoke which lingered in the valley below them.

"We must start," she said, jumping to her feet and offering her hand to help Marilla rise. "I 'm a nurse, not a laborer. I can't take a noon hour when I have so far to go."

"If anyone is entitled to an hour's rest, you are," said Marilla, fervently. "You always think of yourself last!"

Amelia smilingly shook her head. She stood a moment arranging her hair while Marilla picked up the blanket and carried it to the car.

"Is n't that Ruby Fox?" she asked, pointing to the lower end of the field where a short cut from the main road came through the woods. A girl was just crossing the stone fence which separated the field from the woods below.

"And that 's Jim Sanborn with her!" added Amelia as a man followed her slowly over the low wall. The two could be seen standing, apparently in argument. The man raised a stick threateningly, then lowered it, and they went on up the hill in the same order.

"What can they have been doing down the mountain?" asked Amelia, puzzled.

"I suspect that, whatever it is, they don't want you to know," observed Marilla. "I thought Mrs. Fox had a queer look when you asked for Ruby and her grandfather. Perhaps they 're bootleggers."

Amelia laughed in sudden relief.

"It certainly is n't that. For years Jim 's been a perfect nuisance with his temperance craze. He would n't even make cider, but let his windfall apples rot on the ground. He was always talking about the horrors of alcohol. The Poles at the mill specially roused him. He thought they were lost souls because they got drunk sometimes, and of

course they thought he was out of his head when he told them alcohol led to Hell!"

"But is n't that the very kind of person," persisted Marilla, "who swings from one extreme to the other? Perhaps he 's gone from prohibition to bootlegging."

"No," answered Amelia, positively. "I 'd count on Jim Sanborn to die for his principles. It 's more likely that he 's been having trouble with Ruby — she likes to hunt for mushrooms when she should be weaving rugs. The girl 's apparently developing a love of nature. Her grandmother says she 's always running off to wander in the woods. It would be all right if it did n't mean she was neglecting her work. They need all the money she can make. Poor thing, she does n't have much fun."

As they rode down the hill Marilla glanced occasionally at Amelia's quiet face. In her own unrest she was apt to forget that other hearts held sorrows, keener perhaps than any she had known. She supposed that grief had always had the habit of magnifying its own pain. "Each tear thought it was the saddest of them all." But Amelia's reserve gave no hint of the emotions that lay behind it. Her life was one long ministry to the troubles of others. Was her quick sympathy born of personal suffering and disappointment? Marilla asked herself whether he who would understand the courage of those who walk unflinching on the burning coals must himself first pass through the fire — and could find no answer in herself.

Through the rest of the afternoon, accompanying Amelia in and out of houses, Marilla noticed less the pain she beheld than the manner in which it was borne. The quiet heroism with which some of Amelia's patients endured their sickness became as real to her as the diseases themselves. The cloud that hung over Marilla did not lift, but she felt a moment's sick dissatisfaction with her

refusal to be happy unless her cup of joy was running over.

That spring Seth had come to a decision. The small New Hampshire mill, in order to face competition from the large plants, must specialize. Seth was convinced that he must turn to the manufacture of the kind of cloth which he could make more successfully than the large mills with their necessary emphasis on the production of staple goods and on quantity of output. He must introduce variety and multiplicity of pattern. The big aggregations of the woolen industry could not compete with him there. Seth remembered a small French mill he had visited with only two hundred spindles, yet carrying eighty different patterns, and he compared it in his mind with a mill he knew in Massachusetts with over three hundred spindles and only fourteen patterns. American manufacturers had not sufficiently recognized the fact that American women were no longer satisfied with the uniformity that had contented their grandmothers. They were demanding a variety of beautiful types of cloth which were not adequately supplied by home manufacture. Large quantities of fancy dress goods had to be imported from abroad to meet the demand from those to whom cost was less important than distinction of design.

Seth had been following the development of artificial silk with the interest not alone of the weaver, to whom the production of any material that can be spun is important, but of the observer of social changes as well. His grandfather, in the days when there were half a million sheep in New Hampshire and no shortage of wool, had employed two yarns in the weaving of the satinet which was his sole product at the beginning. He had used heavy cotton thread for the warp to give strength to the fabric and wool for the weft to afford warmth and protection against the cold of the northern winter.

Seth's father had not been satisfied to carry on the old routine. He had gone to the Paris exposition in 1867 to find out what the Continental manufacturers were doing and had returned filled with new ideas. He brought back with him the Noble comb, that extraordinarily ingenious machine which, though founded on the simple principles employed by every woman in combing her long strands of hair, required the highest grade of inventive genius, working through years, to bring to perfection. The new machinery made it possible for the mill to use to the best advantage the long fibres of the merino wool, which was being produced in increasing amounts in both New Hampshire and Vermont, and to weave from the beautiful yarn the soft clinging materials which were coming rapidly into fashion on the Continent and in the United States. On the production of unusual and superior dress goods begun at that time the reputation of the Lovell mill had been established. The pure all-wool material was known through the trade and its name was everywhere a synonym for quality.

Seth had decided to return to the mill's original use of two yarns by combining the fine wool with the new laboratory silk in diversified patterns which would possess a special beauty and lustre due to the marked contrast in the materials. He had consulted with experts and finally engaged as a designer a young artist with originality and audacity who was eager to try out his talents in the new medium. Seth felt that what he needed was not a routine manipulator of threads in the old style but an innovator with fresh imagination to devise beautiful and novel patterns for the flying shuttles to weave into cloth. With his experience as a weaver he would be able to discipline the artist's enthusiasm to the necessary limitations of textile design. Meanwhile he lent every encouragement to the trying-out of new ideas, built an extension to

the experimental room, tested unusual dye combinations, started a library of choice books on fabrics, and tried to interest all the mill workers in the developments he was planning. Some of the older employees shook their heads, and many of the Poles were stolid and indifferent, but, either through curiosity or through affection for him, a sufficient number caught the infection of Seth's enthusiasm to introduce a new spirit, the spirit of youth, into the staid workings of the century-old mill. The heart of the changes was in the designing room. There the artist sat at a great table by the window, surrounded by shelves piled high with yarns in scores of colors and shades. They were the palette of the designer who painted in stuffs instead of in pigments, and whose product was to clothe his patron's wife and child, not to adorn the walls of his house.

Seth tried to fire Marilla with his enthusiasm. She obediently looked at all the new arrangements he pointed out to her. She had been through the mill many times and had felt the fascination of seeing the transformation, by the ingenuity of man, of crude materials into objects of utility and beauty for his use. She liked to wander through the receiving room where the great jute bales, full of tied fleeces, were stacked. Each bale had a slit where the buyer had pulled out some fibres for grading. All the bags were stamped with black hieroglyphics indicating their places of origin, and bore the tags of their long journeyings from the ends of the earth. Across a passageway she could walk into the shipping room where the wool was starting on fresh travels, this time in bolts of many-colored fabrics wrapped in heavy paper, and could admire with the old man who had been shipping clerk for forty years the soft texture and fine surface of the cloth.

Seth had given orders that any local fleeces that were

brought in should be bought at the regular market rate. He hoped by this means to encourage those farmers who were trying to revive the husbandry on which the Lovell mill had been originally built to increase their flocks and to attempt large-scale production of wool. One day Marilla found the foreman in charge of the washing room fuming and fussing over some of the fleeces from neighboring farms which he was trying to clean.

"Ain't any better 'n shoddy," he sputtered. "Let alone buying 'em for a high-grade mill like this."

Marilla watched him toss the fleeces contemptuously into the scouring machine to pass through its cleansing a second time. The wool moved along majestically, gently agitated and carried forward by the fingerlike teeth. The bath of soapy water freed its fibres of the greasy "yolk," secreted from the body of the sheep, and washed away the accumulated barnyard dirt which had been entangled in its meshes. The foreman gave Marilla a handful of the light warm mass which had just passed through the drying chamber to show her the change the washing had wrought. She felt its soft elasticity with pleasure, noticing that it was free at last of all foreign substances except the pasture burrs which are the bane of the industry.

As he opened a trap to let out the dirty water, Marilla remembered Seth's distress over the floating burden of brown grease which the drains carried. He had said to her, "Some day we 'll find a profitable use for that waste. Then what we save can pay for the fat we have to put back into the yarn to make it workable."

He had pointed out to her the olive oil, falling drop by drop on a flat strand of wool in one of the long series of machines which was eventually to bring the white fibres, as finished yarn, to the shuttles of the looms. Marilla had watched it with a roused curiosity. How

complex the problems of a man's world were! How much more stimulating than the routine of the housewife's day! Was it any wonder Seth maintained a balance she could not acquire?

Even the anxieties of business helped to make life stirring. She had never seen Seth and Amelia so disturbed as on the day one of the wool sorters was found to have contracted anthrax. It was fortunately not of the internal type and the man recovered, but after that scare new air exhausts were installed under the sorters' tables and the men were compelled to wear rubber gloves when at work. Not many things had power to move Seth to anger, but a sorter who had failed to take the precautions he ordered saw a new side of his amiable employer.

"You're responsible to me for keeping yourself in good condition. I won't have anyone in my mill who does n't take at least as much interest in his health as I do. A second offense and out you go," he had said in a tone whose determination was unmistakable. The man, a round-faced Pole, grumbled a little under his breath, but he acquiesced at least outwardly in the strange demands of American bosses.

When the first large consignment of artificial silk arrived at the factory, Seth came home bringing with him a handful of spools to show Marilla. She was delighted with the lovely texture and the charming colors.

"You'll be clothing kings and queens before you get through," she said, with enthusiasm.

"I'm afraid there are n't enough of them left to make it worth while catering to them," answered Seth, brightening at her interest. "But the orders from the samples we've sent out are coming in fast." Then, encouraged to challenge her habitual depression by a brilliance of color and mood in her which he had not seen for months, he added, "You won't be too disappointed in your hus-

band if he keeps his corner of the old state flourishing, will you?"

She leaned over the back of the chair where he was sitting and embraced him, her face hidden from him.

"I could never be disappointed in you," she half whispered. "It 's I that am useless."

"Marilla," he said, reproachfully. "When you make me happy?" He tried to draw her to him.

"If I did," she echoed, bitterly, eluding his outstretched hands. She leaned over to recover the bright spools she had dropped. As she straightened up, her arms full of the gay silks, he could see that her eyes were dark with tears.

"What 's the use in being interested in the mill," she said, almost violently, "when it will pass out of Walton hands forever when you 're gone!"

Seth looked at her steadily, making no move to touch or caress her. When he spoke his voice was at its quietest.

"I ask for no better gift from life than you. Can't you be more generous toward me in your heart?"

She looked at him in sudden despair. She had an impulse to throw herself in his arms and cut this coil of unhappiness in the tender exchanges of affection, but something oppressive and withering held her back. Was her father living in her again? She felt the rise of ancestral repressions urging her to a life apart. Like the suffering wild animals that go off alone to agonize and die, she sought for healing in the solitude of the soul.

She made some evasive remark and busied herself in arranging the spools in a series with color shading harmoniously into color.

## CHAPTER IV

In May, Seth and Marilla took an express train to Boston. The doctor at Lovell, busy with the pressing matters of life and death that came to his office, had little time and less patience for the complaints of childless women. When Marilla first talked to him he gave her hasty advice, and was annoyed when she kept returning, increasingly despondent and unhappy. He finally suggested that she consult a city specialist.

"I admit I don't know why people don't have children," he exclaimed, throwing up his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "Dr. Stephens does n't always know either, but he sees a hundred cases where I see one and he ought to have some ideas. He 's got time to think about such problems. I 'm so busy looking after the ten-children-to-a-family factory hands that I have n't a minute. All the Polish women want to work in the mill and get ahead, and how can they with a raft of young ones? They 'd think you were in luck, Mrs. Walton."

Marilla flushed, but made no comment.

The doctor looked at her searchingly for a moment and then got to his feet.

"You see Dr. Stephens. That 's my advice. If anyone can help you he can. Let me know what he says when you come back."

He opened the door to let her out, and after a quick nod of farewell beckoned to the next patient in the waiting room.

"These women!" he thought to himself, as he offered a chair to the sallow, anxious-eyed girl who followed him into the office. "Either afraid they 're going to have a baby or afraid they 're not! Enough to drive a doctor crazy!"

On the ride to Boston, Seth sat beside Marilla with his trade paper in his hand, absorbed in the news it could give him of the weaving industry all over the world. Like many another woman, Marilla, in her early days as a bride, had had moments of a vague jealousy of Seth's interest in his business. In the lover the impersonal detachedness of the man is obscured by the stress of primitive emotion. But in the young husband its inevitable return sometimes appears to the wife as a disloyalty or indifference to the marriage tie. But the time came when Marilla felt a gratitude to the activities that fill the life of a man. Her moods were less anxiously watched when there were pressing problems at the mill, and she was freer to think her own thoughts when the price of wool was violently fluctuating.

She glanced at Seth now and then as he bent over his reading. His face was stern in repose, but the firmness of the chin was softened by the sensitive lines about the mouth and by the kindliness of the eyes. The hairs on his temple were beginning to show signs of gray.

He smiled a little, abstractedly, as he caught her look, but he did not speak. Marilla knew he had learned often to seek silence with her in dread of what speech might bring. She felt a moment's remorseful determination to break the bonds that were cramping her life and his, but the impulse was stillborn. She turned back to the window, full of nervous fear and apprehension as to what the day might bring forth.

The doctor's office, with its trained secretaries, its laboratory experts, its air of activity and efficiency, was a little disconcerting. To have one's personal problem material for such cheerful and businesslike investigation seemed to reduce its significance and to make emotional agitation about it inappropriate. For two days Marilla lived in a strange world in which her feelings appeared

trivial and unimportant in contrast to the perfected technique of scientific medicine.

The doctor had welcomed them with professional courtesy, had investigated their family histories, studied the various aspects of their case, and canvassed every possible source of difficulty. When the facts were all in his hands, he sent for them to come to his office. He sat at a desk by the window and motioned them to sit in front of him where the light fell full on their faces. He glanced for a moment at Marilla's tense expression and at Seth's steady eyes. Then he turned to a filing case at his side and pulled out a drawer full of cards.

"Do you see these cards?" he said. "Each one represents a case like yours of people who come to me because they have no children. Some bring me tragic tales which make your story seem like a happy commonplace. You have no past for which you are paying the bitter penalty. You can be thankful for that. Some of these people we can help physically, some mentally. For others we can do nothing. In your case it 's hard to know what to say. I can find no clear reason why you should n't have children. Perhaps some day you will. But you ought to know that there are strange blights which fall upon races, and breeds within races, which suddenly reduce their fertility. You may be the victims of such a biological change."

He paused a moment. Neither the man nor the woman spoke or stirred. In their immobility they might have been pinioned victims waiting the verdict of death. The doctor swung his chair around and picked up a book which lay on his desk.

"Here," he said, "is the record of a cycle of fertility now at a low ebb among the natives of Algeria, and of another cycle among fruit flies, both of which are equally inexplicable and unpredictable. What these cycles mean

or what causes them no man is yet wise enough to say, but here we have the facts."

His hand held the book close as though his analytical mind found wisdom and comfort in its erudite tables and charts. But he looked again at the two before him and laid the book down. What interest had these two people, with the promise of their joint lives unfulfilled, in the scant or numerous progeny of fruit flies and Algerians? They had not come to him for a lecture on eugenics.

"I do not say you will never have children," he went on deliberately, "but it is fair to tell you that a mysterious sterility occurs in a certain percentage of every human group and that it seems to be exaggerated in some old New England strains. Yours is a late marriage of descendants of families of gradually diminishing fertility, and you might possibly be the last of your line."

As he ended, he noticed that Marilla turned suddenly white. The instinct of the physician of souls, which every true doctor becomes in the course of the years, was roused to her help. But not with words of easy consolation. No one knew better than he who daily faced the tragedy of hope deferred that the surgeon who would cleanse the wound must cut deep. The expression of his eyes was kindly, but his voice was stern, firm, and decided, as he said, "It would n't really make you happy if I encouraged you to hope. You 've lived long enough to know that constant disappointment may corrode the very substance of life."

He paused as though hoping for a word from one of them to guide his further speech, but their waiting silence was unbroken. The eyes of both were fixed upon him as though to read their fate in his face.

"There 's nothing like looking at things squarely," he continued. "You New Hampshire people are a taciturn

and silent lot, but you 've got character and you can bear what can't be helped."

Marilla could not trust herself to speak, but as they got up to go Seth said with dignity, "We thank you for being frank with us. We did n't want pleasant lies. We wanted the truth."

The doctor's face lightened. He had not been mistaken in the man. If only the woman should prove to be of the same stuff as her husband!

As he shook hands with them, his final words were, "My advice to you is to go back to Lovell, fill your lives with work, and forget that you ever wanted children. If they come, well and good. If they don't, remember that parenthood is only one incident in life. Search out other ways of being useful and happy."

He returned to his desk after they had gone and on the card headed WALTON, SETH AND MARILLA, wrote slowly, "Prognosis unfavorable. Permanent sterility probable." With his pen still in his hand he looked out of the window for a few moments lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the brick walls of a building across the way. Then with a sigh he replaced the card in the filing case and pressed the bell button on his desk to signal his secretary that he was ready for his next appointment.

Marilla hardly spoke during the long ride back to Lovell. She seemed to shrink from the definiteness of words as from the menace of pain. Seth watched her sadly, feeling within himself the return of the benumbing repressions of his youth. The relief of self-expression in the intimacy of love had come tardily to his reserve, but he had known its sweetness and suffered at the thought of its loss. The barrier of silence rising between them at the time of deepest emotion was to him like the dimming of love. Let him woo her back to the solace of speech by the delicacy of his sympathy and the strength of his affection!

Marilla's mind was a whirl of remembered words, a confusion of advice and admonition which her intelligence accepted or rejected as her mood fluctuated from hope to despair. The doctor's final challenge to her courage and character she recalled with dull indifference. She was like a spent creature no longer responsive to the goad of its driver.

The window beside her was open and she could smell the fragrance of spring in the soft air that blew across her face. Her senses were stirred by the promise of the quiescent earth, but her imagination shrank from the fancied scorn of its fecundity for the barrenness of the childless woman. She alone in the waiting world "that is fruitful and faileth not" seemed dead to the urge of creation to reproduce itself. The useless mould which carried her unsatisfied spirit was incapable of even the brief immortality of bringing forth new life. She thought of the swelling bud, the running sap, the pushing roots beneath the still surface of the land, as forces akin to this passion which possessed her. Tenuous souls, like the fragile filaments of growth, reached out to her from the unknown, imploring the chance to be, and she had nothing but denial for them. In the rhythm of the wheels on the rails she seemed to hear the words of the old song, "Only the graves I love, for in them naught quickeneth more; future for them there is none, even as for me."

She glanced at Seth, bewildered by her emotions. He must be suffering, too, he must also have felt the words of the doctor as the closing of a door, yet he sat quietly watching the coming and going of the passengers, saying the few necessary words to her, as calmly as though they were returning from a pleasant outing. She was conscious of a strange resentment. His strength was an affront to her weakness. She felt she could have thrown herself in

his arms and wept if he had said bitter things and inveighed against life. But his dignity of soul left her to a dry and desolate grief which she had no power to share even with him who loved her best.

## CHAPTER V

For a time after her return from Boston, Marilla led an outwardly active life, busy with her housekeeping and the spring demands of her garden. She was often physically exhausted in the evening, and used her weariness as an excuse for withdrawing more and more from the social life of the town in which she had been a leader in the early days of her married life. Amelia's protests fell on deaf ears.

"I 'm tired of that sort of thing," she said, and would not discuss the matter.

Amelia ventured another word. "Have you thought of Seth?"

Marilla flushed. "Of whom else should I think?" she answered, and changed the subject. But the hint of criticism in Amelia's word was not immediately forgotten. It rankled doubly because it found an ally in her conscience. No nature centres on itself without suffering pangs unknown to the life which is focused on another.

One bright morning when the lilacs were in bloom, Marilla leaned out of her window as she was dressing to breathe in the weighted fragrance of the air.

"I had forgotten how lovely the world is," she said to Seth, holding out her hand to him as though mutely asking forgiveness for many things.

"It 's only lovely when you are smiling in it," he answered, looking at her searchingly. She flushed and made some teasing reply which brought a brightness to his face. They went downstairs in a happier mood than usual.

At breakfast Seth remarked, "I forgot to tell you the latest gossip. Word is going round the mill that Stanislaw Lewenopski's girl in Poland finally got a place in the quota. She was tired of waiting for Stanislaw to send

her passage money, and persuaded her brother in Manchester to buy her a ticket. They say she 's on the sea now, due almost any day."

"Why do you suppose Ewa did n't marry him long ago?" asked Marilla. "I never flattered myself it was our superior arguments." They both laughed. "The girl must be nearly eighteen. She 'll be an old maid, according to the Polish ideas, if she does n't hurry."

"Why not take the car and go to visit her? She 'd probably tell you the facts," suggested Seth, pushing back his chair. Since her marriage Marilla had kept up intermittent relations with her former pupils, and Seth had encouraged her to see them as often as she could. They had been objects of her affection before he came into her life and he hoped association with them would keep alive an early and satisfying interest.

"She 's not working at the mill this week," he urged. "Her machine 's being repaired. The road up that hillside will be wonderful. There used to be lots of lady-slippers along the way. Perhaps it 's not too late for them. You might bring me a bunch."

Marilla hesitated. "I know a June day on Sleeper Hill is a miracle, but how about my garden? I was planning to do some weeding to-day."

"It can wait," answered Seth. "Now that 's settled. You go. I wish I could go with you, but you must enjoy it for us both."

He went round the table to where Marilla was sitting and put his hand gently on her shoulder. As she lifted her face to his kiss, it seemed to him her look was less clouded, more normal than usual, and that her eyes did not fly his like a fluttering bird that fears to be caught. But she said nothing and followed him to the door in silence.

As he looked back at her, standing unsmiling at the door, he had a moment's passing resentment, not at fate,

but at the willfulness of a nature which refuses to adjust itself to the hard facts of life. He scourged his thought as a disloyalty to love, but the inner disquiet would not down. As he spent his days wrestling with the problems of the industry which his grandfather and father had built up and to which his life was given, the conviction was becoming a part of him that no son of his would carry on the tradition of honor and fair dealing to which three generations of Waltons had contributed. But the dignity of a strong nature allows no vain repining. He said to himself that life had dealt generously with him. Marilla had brought him a richness of experience such as he had never known before. His concern should be for her deprivation, not for his own. The growing impatience with which he faced her melancholy must be checked. If only some insight, pointed with affection, could enable him to penetrate the barrier which separated his soul from hers and bring her strength and comfort in the solitude of her sorrow!

When Marilla drove the car up the last steep incline and reached the level stretch of road in front of the Zabka farm buildings, she saw some of the younger children scurrying into the house as if to carry the news of her coming. She stopped the car near the side entrance and got out. The door stood open, but the sagging screen whose wire meshes had rusted and partly broken away was closed. Through the gaps Marilla, with eyes that were dazzled by the glare of the sun, caught a glimpse of motionless figures facing in her direction. She called a word of greeting as she pulled the screen open and stepped into the room.

Mrs. Zabka had evidently been cutting bread, for she was standing at the door of the pantry with a loaf in one hand and a big knife held in the other. Several of the younger children were grouped near her, and at the table, in a red silk dress, her hair bobbed, and a long chain of

large imitation pearls dangling from her neck, sat Ewa. She half rose to greet her old teacher, and Marilla was impressed with how stout the girl had grown. Mrs. Zabka wiped off a chair with her apron and motioned her to sit down. Marilla smiled her thanks and greeted them all. She turned to Ewa.

"What a pretty new dress you have," she said. "And I like your hair bobbed," she added, thinking the neat cut a great improvement over the snarls of the girl's school days.

The girl looked at her mother. Mrs. Zabka wiped the knife absent-mindedly on her apron.

"Ewa don't work. She sit all time," she said.

Ewa looked disdainful. "I 'm married," she said. "My man, he don't want me to work."

"Married!" exclaimed Marilla. "When were you married?"

"Two days," answered Ewa. "Stanislaw's girl is coming from old country. I told him he got to marry me or my fadda he lick him, maybe kill him."

Ewa twisted her pearls with an air of quiet assurance.

Mrs. Zabka nodded toward the girl as she said to Marilla, significantly, "She got to get married pretty quick now."

Marilla felt suddenly sick. To Ewa, by this way of compulsion and shame, was coming the gift of gifts. The old, old way of primitive beings! She had a shrinking memory of the robustness of Stanislaw's courtship, and contrasted it with the delicacy and fastidiousness of Seth's. Did the one type, crude and unlovely, possess reality, potency, the will to survive, while the other, like the ghost of beauty, must perish of its own perfection? She brushed the thought aside, as a sick fancy, and forced herself to think of Ewa.

Her first words to the girl's mother were those of sym-

pathy, but Mrs. Zabka was not responsive. Instead she stood stolidly leaning against the pantry door watching Marilla and Ewa as though the matter no longer concerned her. Marilla turned to the girl. Ewa's manner had the easy complacency of one who has at last accomplished something for which she has long been struggling. She was n't going to work any more. She was going to have all the jewelry she wanted. She did n't believe Mrs. Walton had any prettier chain than her pearls. You could n't get that kind of necklace in Lovell. You had to go to the big cities. She 'd made Stanislaw buy it for her when they went to the priest's house in Manchester to be married. She was going to have a fur coat when the cold weather came. Marilla tried to appear interested in the flood of boasts, but she finally interrupted her to ask:

"Are you going to live here with your family?"

"No," answered Ewa. "Stas got two rooms in Lovell near the mill. We 're going there to-morrow to live upstairs over the Polack store."

"That 's good," said Marilla, pleasantly. "You won't be very far from me. You must come to visit me, Ewa. We have n't seen much of each other since I stopped teaching. You 'll be far away from your mother. You must let me take her place."

Marilla smiled at Mrs. Zabka as she spoke, but Mrs. Zabka could not follow the English very well and only nodded without change of expression.

Ewa looked up with a new interest. "You show me how to make American home? Stas, he want American home in America, he says."

"Of course I will," answered Marilla, cordially. "But you must teach me Polish ways, too. Then we 'll both know more."

Ewa looked pleased at that, and the little boys standing by their mother grinned.

"Our new teacher," said the oldest, "she hate Polish cooking. We told her you like to eat Polish lunches we bring to school, and she say 'Ugh!' "

It was Marilla's turn to laugh. "She 's missing lots of nice food. If she should once taste that sweet bread your mother makes, with the cottage cheese on it, she 'd never eat her own lunch again."

The little boy translated hurriedly for his mother, and she looked at Marilla with a smile. "I give you some now," she said.

The knife was still in her hand. She stepped into the pantry and came out in a moment, carrying in one hand a slice of yellowish bread on a plate, and in the other a white mound of cottage cheese flecked with tiny particles of young onion tips. Marilla spread the cheese on the bread and ate it slowly, the eyes of all upon her. She constantly nodded her appreciation.

"You 'll have to be a good cook, like your mother," she said to Ewa. "Then you can keep your husband happy."

Ewa tossed her head. "I buy American food in boxes. I don't like to cook. Stas don't care. What I do, he likes."

Marilla saw the same lure of manner in the girl she had observed years before, but Ewa was not so pretty as she had been and Marilla felt a little apprehensive. Stanislaw might appear unconcerned for the moment, but he was sure in time to expect things of his young wife she was too inexperienced to foresee and too selfish to anticipate. Marilla felt confident that Ewa would be forced before long to do more than open packages of prepared food.

When she had finished her bread, Marilla stood up to go.

"I 'll come in and see you soon," she said to the girl.

"I have some American pictures I 'd like to hang on your wall."

Ewa looked indifferent.

"You know, you always liked pretty pictures at school," Marilla added.

Ewa had been idly gathering her pearls in her hand and letting them drop again as she listened to Marilla.

"I like all things pretty," she said, holding out the white strand toward her. "I like this, so white and round."

Marilla wondered for a moment if under the vanity of self there was, after all, a real æsthetic sense in the girl. She ran over in her mind the pictures in her collection that might best please an untrained taste.

"That 's good," she said. "But you are leaving lots that 's pretty here to live down by the river in a tenement." She pointed out of the open door to the landscape, lying warm and still in all the delicate green beauty of a June morning.

Ewa shrugged her shoulders.

"Too much hay on farm. Too much work weeding garden," she said, briefly.

Marilla turned to Mrs. Zabka.

"Ewa thinks she 's never going to work any more. We know better. When she gets a home of her own, she 'll have to work all the time!"

Mrs. Zabka gave a vigorous nod of assent.

"Be good for Ewa," she said. "She can no be lazy, now."

Her manner to Marilla was more cordial after that, and she insisted upon taking her to the barn to see some newly hatched chickens and a litter of young pigs. Marilla watched the rooting, sucking little pigs with amused delight. When a bright-eyed white runt came toward her, its round pink snout moving as if in greeting, she bent

over to stroke its stiff bristles. It turned away quickly and ran back to its anxious mother. One of the boys, quicker than Marilla, bent over the edge of the pen, seized one of the young ones as it was running by, and held it up, vigorously squealing its protests. It was a clean creature, living in fresh straw, and Marilla patted its hard little back, smiling at the boy as she did so.

"This my pig," he said. "My fadda give it to me. I 'm going to make him big, fat pig."

"Don't love him too much," she laughed, "or you won't want to kill him, and then what 'll you do for bacon?"

The fluffy yellow chicks brought more exclamations of delight from Marilla. The hen walked away in excited protest, clucking frantically to her little brood. Marilla made no effort to catch the young chicks, but she followed them with smiling eyes as they ran after their mother or stopped to peck hopefully at the dirt of the barnyard.

Mrs. Zabka watched her with a wondering expression. "You like baby pig and baby chicken. Why you no have baby your own?" she asked.

Marilla caught her breath suddenly. The day which had started so brightly for her turned dark in a moment.

"I don't know," she said, faintly.

Mrs. Zabka went on, as if she had not heard her. "American women no have children. Polish women like have big family. Bring money home from mill. Work on fadda's farm. Pretty soon Lovell be all Polish."

Marilla's self-control returned.

"Not quite that," she said, protesting. "It 'll be American always, but the children will talk English and Polish too."

Mrs. Zabka looked mystified, but she made no answer. and they walked back to the automobile talking of other

things. Ewa, who had stayed in the house, waved a friendly good-bye from the window.

One of the boys shut the door of the car for Marilla as she took her seat behind the steering wheel.

"You come again. I like have you come," said Mrs. Zabka, with unexpected cordiality.

Marilla released the brake and the car started to move down the slope.

"I will," she said. "Ewa must n't forget she 's coming to see me, too."

Mrs. Zabka stood watching the car gain speed down the road. She shaded her eyes from the sun until at a sudden bend the dark green body was lost to sight among engulfing trees. She was full of wonder at the strange ways of these Americans with lots of money and no children. But if Mr. Walton had no son to boss the mill, perhaps some day that smart Dybiec boy would be the superintendent and give a good job to her Tomasz.

Marilla's thoughts were not so simple. One moment she was sunk in hopeless depression; the next she was possessed by a fierce rebellion. Whichever way she turned, she saw only the clouded reflection of her own unhappiness. What mirror could give her back the clear image of contentment?

The car, responding like a living thing to her inner tumult, leaped forward and plunged down the hill at a dangerous speed. As the machine rolled upon the concrete roadway at the foot the broad tires sang the low song of rapid running and the brakes at the turns ground harshly. Mrs. Osburn, walking along the sidewalk, tried to signal the passing car, but Marilla dashed by her, paying no heed.

"She drives like a crazy woman," Mrs. Osburn said to her husband that night. "What 's come into her lately? She 's dropped all her old friends and does nothing but

work in that garden of hers from morning till night."

Mr. Osburn was busy eating some creamed potatoes, of which he was very fond, and did not pay much attention to what his wife said.

"Wish I could have her at the River School again," he managed to say between mouthfuls. "We have n't had a teacher since she left that could manage the Polish children. She liked them. The others feel too superior to be much help."

While at work on her belated weeding Marilla formed a resolve. "If I can't get ready for my own baby, I can for Ewa's," she said to herself, and felt comforted by the thought.

When Seth saw her welcoming smile that evening, he rejoiced that the hours in the country had brought a kind of serenity, and listened to her tale of the day's experience with a lighter heart than he had known for a long time.

## CHAPTER VI

The brother of the Polish girl who had been imported for Stanislaw's benefit did not tamely accept the defection of the prospective bridegroom. Instead he had come to Lovell threatening vengeance. His sister, subdued by the strangeness of the new country, had been only too glad to stay in Manchester and leave her cause in his hands. Consequently Lovell had no sight of the slighted girl, but it was witness to a fierce fight in front of the mill between Stanislaw and the self-constituted avenger. Friends finally separated the two, and after much violent argument a settlement was reached in which a considerable sum of money changed hands, and the brother departed apparently satisfied.

Ewa was indignant at such a use of the money which she had planned a hundred ways to spend, and openly expressed her conviction that Stanislaw should have settled the matter with his fists. She was also disappointed that her rival had not appeared and given her a chance to prove to Stanislaw how lucky he was to have married her instead of a greenhorn from the old country.

To Marilla's surprise, Ewa's two rooms over the Polish store were kept scrupulously clean. The energy which the girl had formerly used in beautifying herself seemed now devoted to making her home attractive. Marilla was so interested in Ewa's efforts that she gave her, in addition to a framed photograph of a Raphael Madonna, some gay cretonne for the windows, and several chairs and a table which she could make new by painting with bright colors. When the rooms were finally ready, the kitchen with its shining stove, its black and orange furniture, and its bright figured curtains was the talk of the Polish section of town. Some of the comment of the older

women was unfavorable, but the younger were wholehearted in their admiration. Marilla made no suggestions about furnishing the bedroom. She had a feeling that Ewa would wish to make it as Polish as possible. She watched with interest and curiosity the placing of a plaster figure of the Virgin against the wall and the arrangement of a feather bed for covering, in place of the sheets and blankets to which she was accustomed. How long would evidence of a foreign background remain in these rooms in which Stanislaw wished to have a real American home?

The time came soon when there was pressing need of preparation for the expected newcomer. Ewa's idea was to buy baby clothes ready-made at the store, but she yielded to Marilla's suggestion that the two make a little outfit together. She spent many hours at Marilla's house, using Marilla's sewing machine, learning how to cut from patterns, practising dainty stitches, and watching Marilla's skillful fingers knit tiny sweaters and soft blankets in shades of pink and blue. Marilla read to her from books about the care of babies and advised and helped her with unflagging enthusiasm.

Ewa was first amazed and then fretted by Marilla's absorption in the thought of the coming baby. A strange little jealousy was roused in her. She ceased going every day to the big white house and did more of her sewing in her own rooms. She had no sewing machine, however, and so still had to go occasionally. One morning, when she had carried some stitching to be completed, she found Marilla putting the finishing touches on a basket bed which she was preparing. She had just placed a pad on the little mattress and was bent over tucking in the two small sheets as Ewa came up the stairs. She said a word of welcome and stooped again to lay a pink blanket she had knitted over the top. Then she looked up at Ewa

with a happy smile. But Ewa's face darkened. She snatched off the blanket and the top sheet and threw them aside.

"Polish babies have one sheet," she said, violently. "Dis going to be Polish baby."

Marilla stared at her in amazement. The harsh words striking across her mood of tender emotion brought the tears to her eyes. She could not speak for a moment.

"Of course, Ewa," she managed to say, "it shall be just as you wish."

Her whole expression was one of shocked apology.

Ewa, understanding neither her own feeling nor Marilla's, had an obscure sense of shame.

"It 's all right," she said, trying to smooth the roughness of her speech. "But I don't like two sheets."

Marilla said nothing more. She helped Ewa with her sewing in silence. Ewa, baffled by the change of mood, watched her covertly. When the sewing was done, Marilla said, "You might as well have the baby's basket at home now. It 's all ready. I 'll take it in the car."

She carried it downstairs and placed it in the back seat of the automobile carefully, as though it were something fragile and alive.

When they stopped in front of the Polish store above which Ewa lived, the girl got out and took the basket in her arms.

"'Thank you, Mrs. Walton," she said in a low voice, "for everything."

It was her inexpressive way of asking to be forgiven.

Marilla tried to smile as she watched the little bed being borne up the stairs, but she was left with a feeling of restless dissatisfaction with life that astonished and shocked her. She could no longer even be glad for others! What had she done to her life and Seth's that the moment of exaltation in the snowy Hermit Woods

had come to this? She drove back to her empty house, dreading Seth's eye and hating herself.

Ewa's baby was three days old before Marilla saw it. Mrs. Zabka was in the kitchen when she came, and took her into the bedroom at once. Ewa was lying on her side with her arm thrown protectingly over a little bundle which was hidden under the covers. Her face, framed by her wavy bobbed hair, had a pallor that softened and refined it. Her look was that of an appealing child rather than that of a woman with fresh responsibilities to carry. As Marilla bent over the bed, the young mother threw back the bedding and uncovered the wrinkled red face and soft fuzzy head of the baby. The eyes were closed and the little creased cheeks seemed to fold up over them. The mouth was moving in a sucking motion and the two flabby fists were clenched under the infant's chin. Mrs. Zabka stood at the foot of the bed, watching the two women as they bent over the child. In Ewa's expression was an exulting pride, crossed now and then by a softness new to her hard youth as she caught the flow of feeling in Marilla's face.

"What 's her name?" asked Marilla, speaking in a low voice as though fearful of disturbing the sleeping child.

"Marya. For her," answered Ewa, pointing to the picture of the Madonna on the wall by the bed.

"It 's a beautiful name," Marilla said, still softly. She turned with a smile to Mrs. Zabka, who had not spoken. "Is n't she a pretty baby?" she asked.

"Yes, maybe," answered Mrs. Zabka. "Lots of work." Her words were grudging, but Marilla could see that she was pleased.

"You want to hold the baby?" asked Ewa, on a sudden impulse she could not have foreseen.

Marilla's face brightened.

"May I?" she said.

She lifted the tiny creature, steadying the wobbly head with one hand, and pressed the child to her breast. She touched its cheek gently with her lips and passed her hand caressingly over the downy head. Her eyes did not leave its face. The two women watched her, curiously, not speaking. She suddenly felt the silence and looked up to find their eyes upon her.

"Shall I put her back?" she said, paling a little. "Have I held her too long?"

She turned hastily to look for the basket crib, which had been pushed in a corner.

"No," said Mrs. Zabka, quickly. "Too cold for babies. Sleep with Ewa."

Her whole manner was suddenly unfriendly, betraying the emergence of a deep-seated antagonism. In her jealous defense of inherited customs, she was quick to resent the intrusion of new ways. What could these pushing Americans know about the care of Polish children? Her peasant soul harbored smouldering suspicion and distrust which even friendliness could not wholly allay.

Marilla thought of the hot August weather and the heat pouring in from the kitchen, but she said nothing. She bent over the bed and laid the baby beside its mother. When she looked up again her face wore its usual shadow.

"Marya 's beautiful," she said. "I want to come and see her often." She spoke timidly, as though fearing a rebuff. Ewa moved a little uneasily. She glanced at her mother and then turned back to Marilla.

"Next Sunday we 're going to have a christening party for the baby at Stas' brother Tadeusz' farm on Essex Road. Too small here. Just for Polish people, but we like to have you come. Mr. Walton, too."

"Thank you," answered Marilla, cordially recognizing Ewa's friendly impulse. "We shall certainly try to come. What time is the party?"

"All day," said Ewa, "and nighttime, too."

Marilla smiled. "I should n't think that would be very good for you or the baby. But we 'll come for some of the time anyway."

"Ewa be all well in two days," said Mrs. Zabka. "I go home to-morrow. Then she get up, take care baby."

Marilla bent over the bed and touched Ewa's hand which cuddled the baby's.

"Good-bye," she said. "After your mother goes, I 'll come and see what I can do to help."

She went down the stairs with a moment's glow of happy feeling. If Ewa would only be generous and let her share the baby! Perhaps she could find comfort in mothering another woman's child.

That night Marilla asked Seth where Thaddeus Lewenopski's farm was.

"It 's the old Jones place, Mrs. Barnes' father's farm," he said. "When I was a boy I used to go out there to pick blueberries. The big pasture was blue with them, and Mr. Jones let anyone pick that wanted. Times have changed. I saw a sign there, beside the road, the other day, 'Picking allowed only on shares.' I don't know who put it up, but there must be lots of disappointed boys in town."

"Won't they pick on shares?" asked Marilla. "I should think that sign was an invitation!"

"Now, Marilla," protested Seth, reaching over from the porch hammock where he lay to pat her hand, playfully, "you evidently were never a boy. I can remember my best berry record, picking a milk pail full in two hours. I was pretty proud of that, I tell you. If I 'd had to hand over half of that pailful to the owner of the pasture it would have broken my heart. I 'd never have picked another berry as long as I lived."

"You have no economic sense and no business con-

science," rebuked Marilla. "You 're a wicked profiteer. You want all your gross receipts to be profit."

Seth stretched himself, luxuriously. "I 'll make a business woman of you yet," he said. "You have the patter already. Buy a little wool and sell a little cloth and I 'll take you into partnership."

"You did that long ago," said Marilla in a low voice. The day's experience seemed to have thrown a tenuous bridge across the abyss of emotion between herself and Seth on which she could tread without fear of being plunged into the depths. After a silence she spoke from the protecting darkness, "Ewa's baby was so tiny."

Seth reached for her hand and held it in a firm grasp. It lay passive in his for a moment and then was withdrawn. He did not venture words, but lay in the hammock waiting for her to speak. His nature all too easily accepted silence as the way of life. The sudden impulse that had driven Marilla to speech seemed to have spent itself, as though she suddenly repented of having put into words the emotion in which she lived.

The moonlight threw patterns of lace on the white lawn and cast waving shadows on the screens of the porch. Now and then someone strolled along the sidewalk in front or turned in at one of the houses on the street, but the gate by the lilacs was not opened. Their seclusion held. Occasionally a car whirled by, cutting the darkness with the slash of its headlights, but there was little passing, and the deepening night gradually hid their faces from each other. The rifts in their mutual consciousness which words might have filled, as the threads of the weft, weaving in and out of the warp, make the fabric one texture, widened. In silence they watched the moon pass the zenith and sink toward the west and a light wind move the vines above their heads and blur the shadows of the leaves that fell on the lawn at their feet.

## CHAPTER VII

THE Sunday of the christening came. A dress Marilla had made for the baby had been selected by Ewa for the christening robe; Hedwig's mother, Mrs. Onski, was to be the godmother, and Feliks Dybiec the godfather; the Polish friends had been invited to come, and each was confidently expected, in accordance with the national custom, to bring a good-will offering for the occasion. Seth was taking a five-dollar gold piece to present to the parents, and Marilla carried a lace hood as her gift to the baby.

Marilla had listened with much interest to Mrs. Zabka's stories of the baptismal customs in Poland. Ewa had seemed indifferent to many of them and quite ready to break with the social traditions of her mother. She consented to have godparents for Marya, but refused to heed the taboo that would have kept her in her room until she could go to the church for the special cleansing service for a new mother. A few days after the baby's birth she was in and out of her tenement and down in the store beneath, gossiping with the neighbors while she hung out the wash of tiny garments. She seemed as vigorous as ever, though the creamy pallor of the nursing mother gave her an unexpected look of delicacy.

Sunday morning, Mrs. Barnes came in as usual to prepare the Waltons' dinner. She was full of interest in the christening party, which was to be at the farm on which she was born.

"Thaddeus Lewenopski bought the place two years ago," she told Marilla. "The soil on that farm 's about the best round here, and he 's trying to make his whole living on the land. I don't want to say anything against my father; he was a hard-working man and he farmed

the best he knew how. But that Polander can raise twice as much truck as my father ever could on the same land. The whole family works out in the fields, the wife and all the children, and that helps some. Folks seem to think that 's awful hard on the children, but I don't see as it hurts them a mite. I think my boy might have had better health if we 'd stuck to the farm."

Mrs. Barnes' son was in college, a brilliant scholar, but delicate and constantly handicapped by lack of physical vigor.

"How do the mill workers ever get enough money to pay for a farm?" exclaimed Marilla, thinking of the high cost of shoes and flour and the low selling price of hay and potatoes.

"It beats me," answered Mrs. Barnes as she sewed up the stuffed chicken and set it in a pan. "They get along without things most of us think we 've got to have. The bank helps them some, too. Mr. Pepper at the bank told me the Polanders always have the interest ready on the day it 's due. He don't have to run after them. They run after him to pay it."

"They have n't learned American business methods," said Marilla, slyly, in an aside to Seth, who came into the kitchen as Mrs. Barnes spoke.

"You see, Mrs. Barnes, I have a traitor in my own camp," he remarked, smiling, as he opened the back door to go out. "But you can be sure she would n't let anyone else talk that way about her husband's work."

Mrs. Barnes made no comment. She put the chicken in the oven and shut the iron door briskly. "I sometimes ask myself what 's going to happen to the Polander children," she said. "Will they do like their parents did? My children won't. I was brought up on a farm, and never thought of going to anything but district school,

but my children are all set on college and on living in the city."

"Yes," said Marilla, reproachfully, "and you are working your fingers to the bone to make it possible for them to do so!"

"Well, I suppose it 's the nature of us American people always to try to go up, though I must say what some folks calls up looks to me sometimes like down," observed Mrs. Barnes, fanning her hot face with her apron. "Did you say you wanted them cut glass cups for the dessert to-day or the yellow saucers?"

Marilla did not go to the church christening in the morning, but in the middle of the afternoon she and Seth started for the farm. A car in front of them was scurrying along, packed full of people. Small children seemed to be stowed in every available space, and Marilla's count of the heads which bobbed into view soon reached an incredible total.

"The town is turning out to do honor to little Marya," she said, enthusiastically.

"I 'm afraid the town is turning out to have a good time for itself," answered Seth. "I hope someone has a tight hold on the legs of that child."

A small head, with light hair blowing in the wind, stuck out over the side of the car ahead, its owner evidently trying to peer round to see who was following. While they were watching, the head disappeared with a sudden jerk.

"Someone apparently had," laughed Marilla. She nestled close to Seth's side with a moment's impulse of tenderness. "How beautiful the world is to-day," she said.

Seth took his hand from the wheel and patted her arm. He felt the quick relief from tension her demonstrations of affection always roused in him.

"I don't know about the rest of the globe, but New Hampshire is certainly at its best. Not everyone would agree with that. Some people think New Hampshire is only a long way to Montreal."

"Yes," added Marilla with a smile, "or a source of water power! The poor, ragged, grown-over land! Who could help loving it?"

"Some do," said Seth, "but we did n't, and that 's why we 're riding happily along Essex Road together." He gave her hand a final pressure before he grasped the wheel again. Marilla fell silent. She remembered the challenge to her imagination which the sight of his picture in the Topolski's parlor had made. To-day, though she was his wife and loved him, that emotion had died down. What happened in the human soul to bring these strange undesired changes to pass? On the pretense of rearranging her dress, she drew a little away from him as if to be freer to think.

Seth pointed to a small flock of sheep cropping grass in a cut-over field.

"I loaned the man on that farm the money to buy his first lamb. He took care of sheep as a boy and he has a great respect for a good breed. He 's raised a young ram that 's a prize winner. I believe he 's going to prove to his neighbors that it 'll still pay to raise sheep in this state next door to a woolen mill."

Marilla smiled a little remotely.

"You never give up hope, do you?" she said. "But is an unsuccessful farmer likely to succeed with sheep?"

"The most unexpected people succeed with sheep," said Seth, fervently — "sometimes men that fail with everything else. Let 's hope he 's that type."

Through an opening in the wayside trees they caught sight of a farmyard crowded with parked cars and heard the strains of a merry jig.

"This is the old Jones place," said Seth. "They've begun their dancing early. They usually wait till it's dark."

As they drove into the yard, they saw that the music was not being played for dancing. A boy, leaning against the side of the house, was amusing himself by practising tunes on a shiny new harmonica.

"That fellow is trying to show the others that he's completely Americanized," said Seth to Marilla, with a laugh. "If they would only stick to their own instruments and give us some real Polish music!"

Marilla waited for Seth to open the door of the car. She smiled a little, remembering the early days of their acquaintance when his social inexperience had made him seem indifferent to her comfort. She had long since discovered that he was naturally more thoughtful than she, though not always ready in the expression of his solicitude. She found herself at times conscious of being fretted by a protecting affection that assumed a yielding to the tendance of love she did not feel.

Men and boys were lounging round the open door of the barn, talking and listening to the boy's music, but the women were apparently all inside the house. After a word with Stanislaw, who introduced Seth and herself to his brother, Thaddeus, Marilla crossed the yard and stepped into the kitchen. Mrs. Zabka, full of pleasant excitement, was just inside. She led Marilla into the sitting room, where Ewa, with flushed cheeks and an excited manner, was exhibiting little Marya. The child was sleeping peacefully in the arms of her godmother, indifferent to the attention she was receiving. But the young mother, for the first time in her life, was having the prominence her soul craved. The red silk dress and the necklace of pearls adorned her, and Marilla saw that a pair of red silk stockings had been added to her toilette. But she

noticed for the first time that Ewa's interest was no longer confined to herself and her appearance. It had enlarged to include the child. The dawning affection with which she hovered over the baby gave promise of becoming, under the simple conditions of her existence, the dominant passion of her life. Marilla wondered if the needs of the child were already beginning to crowd out those of the mate. Stanislaw would in time be less the lover to be placated than the father to be held to full responsibility for his offspring.

A silent little woman, almost Mrs. Zabka's age, was introduced to Marilla as Mrs. Thaddeus Lewenopski. Marilla remembered Ewa's telling her that Thaddeus, nearly twenty years older than his brother, had been many years in America before he sent for his family. The wife seemed to know no English, but she curtsied to Marilla with a timid smile, and watched her as she spoke to the other women with the assured air of old familiarity and friendship. Marilla could not know that her manner brought to the mind of her quiet hostess memories of the long-dead mistress of many servants in an old manor house in Poland. The Countess Jadwiga Tanska had had just such a quick step and speech, as if already knowing that she had far to go and must hasten on the way.

Mrs. Lewenopski was quietly attentive to the comfort of her guests in the New England farmhouse, but her thoughts had flown back to that distant Polish manor house, one-storied, with its double line of poplar and lime trees, its rambling outbuildings and the great haystack by the barn. She saw herself in bright red skirt and gay kerchief, barelegged, a heavy polishing cloth under each foot, sliding back and forth across the floor of the big central room until the surface shone like glass and just such a lady as Marilla came to praise her for what she had done. America began to seem familiar to her

wondering eyes. All people cannot be equal, as Thaddeus had said they were in America. She had never believed him anyway, and now that she had seen Marilla she knew he was mistaken. It was good to have ladies and gentlemen even in a country like America. She wanted someone to look up to and admire. Her peasant sense was comforted and reassured by the strange American lady.

As Marilla went from room to room, she was conscious that the searching eyes of the woman followed her. She smiled in return when she caught the steady gaze, but the two had no words with which to communicate and had to content themselves with an exchange of friendly glances.

Outside, the music of the harmonica had ceased. A violin started playing a tune that roused the women in the house as a wind stirs the birch leaves in spring.

Ewa looked at Marilla with excitement in her face. "The children dance Polander dance. You come."

She and Marilla went out, followed by most of the women. Marilla could see Mrs. Onski, the baby in her arms, move to the window where she could catch a glimpse of the fun.

In the yard, the men were standing in a wide circle, in the centre of which eight little boys and girls were dancing a mazurka with much clapping of hands and nodding of heads to emphasize the rhythm of the music. The violinist was swaying his body as he played, and the audience stamped their feet and clapped their hands as if unable to keep still under the witchery of the brilliant little air. They were oblivious of everything except the motions of the children, weaving in and out in the intricate measures of the dance. Seth was the only man who glanced up as the women came out of the house. He nodded to Marilla as she reached his side. "I always

thought I liked music," he said, under his breath, "but see these people! They 're in another world." The two stood watching the faces about them, even more interested in the absorbed onlookers than in the gay young dancers themselves.

When the music stopped, there was much shouting and clapping of hands, and the children were urged to dance again. This time they danced the polka, and Marilla thought she recognized the music as Chopin's. She remembered hearing that the artist had taken motifs from old Polish folk tunes and elaborated them into compositions of his own.

Some of the young men caught the girls who stood in the doorway round the waist and danced with them outside the circle, scuffing the gravel of the old driveway in their quick runs and turns till the rolling of the pebbles sounded like tiny accompanying castanets.

"Old Mr. Jones thought dancing was a sin," said Seth to Marilla. "What would he say to such a carnival of happiness in his old dooryard? On Sunday, too!"

Marilla looked at the dancers enviously. "Does n't their abandon make our demure amusements seem like the pallid play of ghosts?" she said. "I 'd like to dance like that, would n't you? But we could n't do it. Even if we learned the steps, we 'd march like soldiers on parade, or advance and retreat like waitresses at a church sociable. It is n't in us."

"Our ancestors wanted to play golden harps in Heaven. That 's why they let terrestrial music go," suggested Seth.

"The sinful creatures longed for real music and took golden harps when they could n't get a hand organ," remarked Marilla, flippantly. "But the repressed old dears have certainly left us a crippled inheritance. We actually *can't* dance as these Poles do, even though our muscles are as good as theirs."

When the dance ended, Stanislaw came up to speak to them. He was short and stocky, with a broad face and a strong back and bowed legs that seemed to grip the earth. His complexion had the unhealthy pallor of the factory worker, in marked contrast to the men who combined farming with the day's activity at the mill. In spite of doing double duty, they seemed more vigorous than their fellows who lived in the Lovell tenements and did no work on the land. Stanislaw's body looked as if it were built to follow the plough and pitch hay and cultivate long rows of corn and potatoes, but his hands were long and slender and bore evidence of his skill with intricate processes of weaving and with delicate manipulations of machinery. He carried himself with the confident air of a man who feels he is master at whatever he is doing.

"I want to offer my congratulations," said Seth. "May I make a little birthday gift to the baby?" He offered the five-dollar gold piece, which Stanislaw accepted with a word of thanks. Then the young man shrugged his shoulders. "She only a girl. Polander man want boys. Boys work, help fadda."

Marilla interrupted, "How about girls to help the mother? Don't you think she has a right to help, too?"

"Polanders have boys. American ladies can have girls. All right for rich people. But Americans no like have children. You no children. Lots of American people no children." Stanislaw threw out his hands in a gesture of hopeless bewilderment.

Marilla shrank from the rough outspokenness of the man, but Seth said with quiet courtesy, "You 'll have to raise sons and daughters to take the places of the Americans who have no children."

Stanislaw laughed, "Take long time. Polander children not so smart as American children."

"Oh, yes, they are," said Seth, spokesman of the faith

in which he had been reared. "Just give them a chance. That 's what this country 's for, to give them a chance."

Stanislaw smiled pleasantly. Mr. Walton could talk that way, but he did n't understand. No one born in New Hampshire could know how much a Polish boy had to learn and unlearn before he could begin to be a real American.

While they talked, the guests had been gradually moving into the barn, where a central space had been cleared and freshly swept. Stanislaw motioned to Seth and Marilla.

"They 're going to dance old Polander dance," he said excitedly. "Come quick!"

He could not wait for them, but ran up the sloping entrance as the first note of the violin sounded. Marilla and Seth followed more slowly, but in time to see Hedwig Onski and Jan Dybiec, in peasant costume and with wooden clappers in their hands, dart out from a horse stall where they had evidently been hiding and run into the centre of the circle, which was instantly widened to give them room. Hedwig had grown into a beautiful young girl, with lovely blue eyes and shining yellow hair which hung in two long braids down her back. Jan was not so handsome as she, but he was slender and lithe and moved with quick grace. The brilliant peasant costumes held the eyes of all the group as the elaborate dance began. Marilla wondered what expert in the art had had the skill and patience to teach the young people to execute the steps with such ease and precision. The clappers accented the quick turns of the interweaving measures and lent snap and fire to every motion. The violinist bent and swayed toward the dancers as though sharing their rhythm. When they finally stopped, breathless and panting, he shouted some Polish words in a frenzy of enthusiasm.

"He say, never, not in Poland or America, did he see anyone dance it so well. It 's very old dance he taught them for surprise for party," said Ewa, in happy excitement as she stood by Marilla and saw her admiration.

They all crowded round to look at the costumes and to praise the two for their beautiful performance. The older people showed the keenest pleasure. Some of the younger ones hung on the outskirts, a little contemptuous, and Marilla and Seth overheard two of them comparing Hedwig's dancing unfavorably with that of their favorite movie star.

Marilla exchanged a look of amused distress with Seth. Then she went up to greet Hedwig and Jan. She made Hedwig turn round so that she could admire the charming costume with its bright embroidery and its bold contrast of colors. The rest stood about, smiling their pleasure at the delight of the American lady in the Polish dress and dance.

"I wish you would never wear ugly American clothes!" exclaimed Marilla, finally. "Think how pretty school would be with all the children dressed like this!"

Hedwig smiled. "Everyone would laugh at us if we did!"

"Not good dress for wash dishes or weed garden," said Mr. Topolski, who was standing near. "Polander boys and girls dance Sunday. Must work all rest of time."

"Do your children work as *you* used to when you were a boy?" Marilla asked him suddenly. Seth had moved off to speak to Mrs. Topolski, who worked occasionally in his mill.

Mr. Topolski threw up disclaiming hands. "All time movies. Want new clothes. Want wear shoes, summer and winter. Want to live in town. Say farm too much work."

"Perhaps in this country they 're needed in the mill more than on the farm," suggested Marilla.

Mr. Topolski, like his peasant fellows, was unable to grasp abstract ideas readily. He looked at Marilla a little uncertainly and then repeated, "Farm good place for Polander. Women, children, work. Nice house. Have cow, pig, plenty food for big family. Americans have maybe one, two, children. Can work in mill, but Polander not. He have many children. He need farm."

The women were moving about in the group, passing plates of cakes, babas, placeks, mazureks, all crisp and delicious, and some, new to Marilla, flavored with poppy seeds. A great pitcher of buttermilk, with the delicate flavor possible only when cream is churned fresh, was carried round and glasses were filled with it. Everyone ate and drank heartily, and the conversation became loud and at times almost violent. Marilla looked up once or twice, fearing the beginning of a quarrel, but she soon saw, by the bursts of delighted laughter, that what she took for disagreement was simply an excess of enthusiasm in a loquacious and spirited people.

After they had eaten, Marilla and Seth started home in spite of the hospitable urging of their hosts that they stay and take part in the dancing that would continue till midnight. When they drove away, the sound of the talk and laughter still followed them. As they went over the brow of the hill, they caught the clear notes of the violin beginning again the brilliant air of a waltz.

"I am exhausted," exclaimed Marilla, "with such intensity of life. How can we quiet, self-contained people ever compete with such redundancy of emotion? They live twice as much as we do in the same length of time."

"Don't mistake noise for depth of emotion," suggested Seth. He was driving between flanking hay fields and his eye was held by the waves of green grass on the slope,

dark in the trough and light on the crest, as they flowed like water under the drive of the wind. "Stillness does not mean less feeling, only greater self-control."

"That may be," answered Marilla, "but how in the long run can they help pushing us off the earth?"

She fell silent, pondering on the way in which the fecund races were slowly but surely supplanting her kin and Seth's in this pleasant New Hampshire country. It was no new phenomenon in the history of the world. From the very beginning one people must have reaped what another had sown, and racial remains have piled up, one on top of another, like the prehistoric cities on which ancient Troy was built. Why mourn over the personal bearings of inevitable change? A reckless desire was born in her to put restlessness and discontent behind her and search out some less restricted life in the world beyond the hills. She glanced at Seth's face with its look of quiet strength as though its poise were a rebuke to her errant fancies and an obstacle to her will. She forebore to think.

With an effort she forced herself to discuss the party and to wonder and surmise as to what would be the future of the Lewenopski family and its Polish kin.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE next winter the Lovell mill was having difficulty in keeping up with its orders. The new designs had caught the popular fancy and the Walton cloth was in great demand. An addition to the mill, planned in the spring, was completed in record time in the early fall. Seth had been busy, night and day, in speeding up the erection of the building and rushing the orders for new machines to be installed as soon as the floors were ready to support their weight and the roof to shelter them from the weather. Marilla saw little of him during the busy months of October and November. He was away a good deal, and when in Lovell worked late at night in his office at the mill.

Alone in the house evening after evening, Marilla began to think of Seth with detachment, less as a part of her own life and more as a factor in the lives of others. She had from the first taken pride in his business ability as part of what made him an interesting individual, but as she visited the new building where the heavy machines were being hoisted into place and saw the attitude of the whole town to the fresh developments she received a new and not wholly welcome impression of his importance to the community. A woman's imagination is stirred by a man's power in the world of affairs, but she does not necessarily love him the more for it. Marilla found herself admiring Seth, but without a rise of primitive emotion to sweep away the conflict in which she lived.

The new machines were manned by a fresh importation of Galician Poles from Connecticut, who had been persuaded by their relatives in Lovell to come to the north country where mills fringe the waterfalls and farm lands are wrested from the rocks. The tenements in the

narrow valley were soon overflowing, and outlying farms were rented or bought by the newcomers and quickly filled with the noise and energy of fair-haired, vigorous children.

The school superintendent was hard pressed to find room for the new pupils who must be educated. Old schoolhouses, which had been shuttered and empty for years, were reopened and echoed once more to the singsong of the multiplication table and the laborious reading of cat-and-rat tales in the primer.

Qualified teachers were not found at once, and during the winter months Marilla, in response to an appeal from Mr. Osburn to help him for old friendship's sake, consented to substitute for a time in one of the newly opened schools. She felt the physical and nervous strain of carrying both her home and school responsibilities, but her revived enthusiasm for teaching bore her along.

Seth had at first objected. He belonged to the generation of husbands whose pride was hurt at the bare idea of their wives' working for pay. But when he saw the Marilla he had first loved live again in the eager woman who had returned to her beloved profession he suppressed his disapproval as unkind both to her and to himself. He was rewarded by a lifting of the veil behind which she had more and more hidden herself, and by a renewal of the old frank, affectionate comradeship of the days of their engagement.

At night when he returned home he found her smiling and ready to talk, full of the events of the day and of busy plans for the morrow. Amelia came in more often, as though she felt herself a welcome visitor in the midst of the activities and interests of a normal life and no longer an intruder in an atmosphere of feeling to which she had no clue. If she observed that Seth and Marilla showed little desire to be alone, she thought it but

natural and inevitable. Marriage, as she saw it in her daily rounds, was invariably accompanied by a dying down of the exclusive emotion of the lovers and the substitution of interest in the routine and duties of the day for the earlier absorption in each other. She rejoiced that Marilla had found in teaching a happiness which she had not been able to find in Seth's affection alone. She made no attempt to analyze or explain. Experience had taught her to be content with actualities. Only on certainty could a life of action such as hers be based.

By spring regular teachers had been found for all the schools and Marilla's help was no longer needed. She returned to her housekeeping and to the planting of her garden, but without enthusiasm. Even her interest in her flowers seemed mysteriously to have waned. She watered and weeded, perfunctorily. The joy was gone.

Seth, coming back late one evening from the mill, where a night shift was at work, found Marilla sitting in the dimly-lighted living room. She neither spoke nor looked up at his entrance. He stood beside her a moment in silence.

"Why did you love me more when you were away than now when you are at home and see me so often?" he asked, looking at her sadly. His voice did not invite denial of his words, and she offered none, but lifted her face to his with an expression in her eyes as though seeing him from a great distance.

She took his hand and bent her head again, pressing her cheek against the palm.

"Perhaps something dies down in us as we get older," she said, her face hidden from him. "The heart beats more slowly. How can we expect it to feel as it did?"

The sadness in Seth's face only deepened.

"Of course we can't force ourselves to feel — or not to feel," he said, and resolutely changed the subject.

That night Seth, tired though he was from his long day of work, lay long wakeful on his bed. His nature was simple and unanalytical and he could neither follow nor understand the labyrinth of Marilla's thought. He was hurt and baffled by her silence and her speech alike, and was more and more retreating into himself. The instinct to seek relief from pain by shunning the source of suffering was taking the place of sympathy and compensating tenderness in his heart. Yearning and self-reproach tore at his waking consciousness as his eyes watched the pale light from the street lamp on the ceiling of the room, until he fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

Marilla, lying high on her pillows, closed her eyes, clutching at sleep as the one certain way to make time go faster.

Early in August a college classmate of Seth's, Albert Ford, came from New York to inspect the mill. He was a large buyer of woolens and worsteds and he wanted to see the new developments in design and material which Seth was initiating. After a day and a half of delighted observation, he had given a big order which would keep the mill working overtime for weeks, and returned to the house with his host Saturday afternoon ready to enjoy himself. His manner had the exuberance of the typical salesman, which is so apt to mask the real man, but Marilla could see that he was genuinely fond of Seth. He laughed readily and liked to tell humorous stories, but when the conversation swung away from trivialities he was as serious as Seth himself. Marilla felt mystified by him, but curious.

This was his first visit to New Hampshire, and he was keenly interested in its people, its industries, and its nat-

ural beauties. He confessed that the burning desire of his life had always been to climb a mountain. With the sand flats of his native New Jersey as a measure, he looked at any elevation with respect, and the three-thousand-foot heights which Lovell called mountains filled him with awe and ambition.

"Why not take him up Blueberry Mountain tomorrow?" suggested Marilla. "We could carry our lunch and spend the day. That would give us plenty of time. We should not have to exhaust the tenderfoot from New York by hurrying him."

Albert laughed scornfully.

"I do radio exercises every morning," he said. "You can't tire me."

"Perhaps not," said Seth, looking at Albert's double chin with a quizzical smile. "We can try it, anyway, and you can see how it compares with morning exercises when you 're once safely down."

They started off in the car the next morning to ride to the foot of the mountain. The lunch was packed in a bag for Seth to carry.

"There 's an old trail up the mountain that leads through Hermit Woods. It has the best views. I think we 'll try that," said Seth as they took their seats. He turned to Marilla.

"Don't you think Albert would be interested to see a real New Hampshire hermit? It would confirm him in his opinion that we are an odd people."

Marilla looked her doubts. "If he were ever visible," she said, dubiously, remembering the hurrying figure and the locked door of years before. Then she added with a smile, "We can show him where a hermit lives and trust the New Jersey imagination to do the rest. I 'm sure it would be better than the reality."

Her manner was animated and gay and her cheeks

brilliant with color. Seth's spirit rose to match hers. He could see that she enjoyed Albert. Her responsiveness to people had always been a delight to him and he had missed it of late. But to-day she was her old self. Let him put his depression behind him and patiently bide his time. All would yet be well.

Their visitor was full of interest in everything he saw — the brush-fringed road beside the tumbling river, the mountains which seemed to shift their positions as the automobile moved along, the meadows where the hay was being cut, and the woods with their vigorous new growth actively invading the cleared fields and the pastures.

"Do you remember Kipling's story, 'Letting in the Jungle'?" Albert asked, as they passed a field dotted with birches and young pines. "It looks to me as if the natives of India were not the only people that have to fight the feverish energy of nature. The New Hampshire farmer will have to get busy if he expects to save his farm from being swallowed up."

"We hear a lot of talk about deforestation in this country," said Seth, "but there is three times as much wooded land round here as there was when I was a boy."

"Yes," added Marilla, "and the old cellar holes rimmed with fireweed tell the reason why. The country is deserted."

"But are the trees that are growing up the kind that will provide timber, or are they just useless forest weeds?" asked the city man.

"That 's a pretty intelligent question for a swivel-chair forester," said Seth, smiling at him. "Where 'd you learn so much about trees?"

"On my way up here I read an article on lumbering in one of these pestiferous magazines they force on you in

the train, and an idea or two stuck in my mind. Give me the answer."

"We could speed up the process a lot by planting seedlings, of course, but I think the pine is bound to come back in the end," said Seth. "This is natural pine country. In the original royal grant to the Masonian proprietors there was only one reservation. The king retained the right to cut the tallest pines for masts for his navy. That gives you an idea of what the virgin growth must have been."

As they rounded a bend in the road, they heard the rapid clicks of a mowing machine and, above the sound of the machinery, the strong voice of the driver, singing a gospel hymn as he sat on his high iron seat guiding the horses. He lifted the toothed cutting blade over threatening rocks in the field and dropped it again, caroling as he went. Now and then he interrupted himself to address violent adjurations to the horses, then returned cheerily to his appeal, "Oh, to be nothing, nothing, only to lie at His feet."

"The oppressed and downtrodden farmer, I suppose," said Albert, with a twinkling eye.

From the back seat where she sat cuddled under a rug, — for the morning was brilliant and a little cool, — Marilla answered quickly, "Our New Hampshire philosophers are n't all in the educational institutions. There 's a man bigger than anything that can happen to him."

"Noisier, perhaps," laughed Albert, his arm on the back of the seat as he turned to speak to her. He was in gala mood and not inclined to waste time talking about a singing harvester which might be better spent in charming a lady. He wished Seth's wife had a little more snap to her. She was pleasant enough, but dreadfully serious. He liked a woman to be jolly and to flirt a little with a

man. Marilla seemed anxious to please him, but it might be for Seth's sake and not for his own. But then, what else could you expect of a woman who had been a schoolmarm? All brains and no feminine fascination, of course!

Seth parked the car near the entrance to the Hermit Woods trail. He threw the bag containing the lunch over his shoulder and picked up a cane which was lying on the floor of the car.

"I brought this along for you," he said, handing the cane to Albert. "I think you'll find it a help. Three legs are better than two, on a climb."

"But what'll you do?" demurred his friend.

"Marilla and I are regular mountain goats," answered Seth. "We could run up and down this mountain without stumbling or losing breath."

"I don't quite accept that as the whole truth," said Albert, swinging his cane as they started. "But you might lose less breath than I would."

Seth and Marilla had fallen a little behind as they turned into the path. He took her hand and held it for a moment. The wintry walk of three years ago was in the minds of both. Marilla felt a moment's thrill; then a flatness fell upon her spirit. She thought of the surging impulse that had driven her into his arms that day. The tide had ebbed, taking with it so much of the zest of life. Had her womanhood failed her in not thinking first, as a girl might have done, of the lover himself? She threw off the haunting fancy and sought to recover the happier mood of the morning.

Seth soon took the lead, followed by Marilla in her neat knickers and green sweater and hat, and Albert brought up the rear. The path was clear and well trodden for some distance as though frequently used. They came shortly to the little clearing where the hermit's shack

stood. The path to his door led across the tiny brook with its muddy, spongy banks, but the trail up the mountain kept straight ahead.

"That 's where the hermit lives," said Seth, pointing to the shabby building with its rain-streaked tar-paper covering. He told two or three facts about the solitary man and added a few of the wild guesses of the gossips.

"There, but for the grace of Marilla, lives Seth Walton," he said, putting his hand affectionately on his wife's shoulder. "I was a real old hermit till I met her."

Marilla answered him with a shake of smiling denial and looked again at the hut for signs of life.

"See that?" said Albert, pointing excitedly. "The old fellow evidently has a lady friend. There 's the fresh mark of a woman's shoe on that bank!"

On both sides of the sluggish stream were the clear prints of a small shoe with sharp heels that had cut deep in the mud. They led toward the clearing and there were no signs of a return.

Marilla flushed and then paled. "It 's probably a girl going blueberrying on the mountain," she said, hurriedly. "She stepped off the trail for part of the way. We 'll meet her higher up."

"Let 's hope so, for the sake of preserving the romance of the hermit," exclaimed Albert, laughing. "Though, from what I 've read about the old codgers, they 're as complete degenerates as human nature can manufacture."

Marilla did not answer. She had no natural taste for gossip and shrank from the suggestion of evil in Albert's casual remark. For a time she was silent, but the loveliness of the day and the cheerful conversation of the two men drew her from unpleasant thoughts. When the trail became steeper and they began to climb in earnest, she was ready to forget everything except the

beauties ahead. She and Seth were so accustomed to long tramps in the woods that they could walk rapidly without tiring. But Albert soon began to lag behind and gasp for breath. He called them to curb their speed and give him a chance to catch up. They waited beside the trail.

"But I thought you did radio exercises every morning!" exclaimed Seth, in mock surprise. "Perhaps you miss the music."

"I guess that's it," answered Albert, with a rueful smile, as he sat down on a rock beside the path. "I don't want to be a cripple before my time. Go more slowly after this."

"You walk ahead," suggested Seth. "It's discouraging to bring up the rear. You'll find you go faster and get less tired if you're in the lead."

"Seth taught me that when we first began climbing," said Marilla, sticking a bunch of bright red berries in her belt. "Since then I've led him up many hills — and down more," she added, looking at Seth with an expression that was not easy to read.

Seth spoke quickly, "But always home again," answering her look rather than her words.

Albert stood up. "I'm equal to another hundred feet," he said with a groan. "Follow me."

He started at a fast walk.

"Slow down," called Seth. "We've got plenty of time, and I don't want to carry you back after you've suffered a collapse."

Albert moderated his pace a little and stopped frequently to rest. His climbing had all the unsteadiness of the novice, spurts of speed alternating with periods of breathless exhaustion. Marilla and Seth followed more slowly, encouraging their companion by picturing the beauties that awaited him at the top.

The path crossed an open place where years before

someone had made a small clearing. The abandoned field was now overgrown with scrub trees, and berry bushes laden with fruit covered the ground. The view, free of obstructing foliage, was magnificent. Ridge after ridge, running along the horizon, gave promise of other ranges which would be revealed as they climbed higher. The green of the distant pine-covered heights was overlaid with blue, a bloom as delicate as that on the berries at their feet.

Albert threw himself on the ground. His head was pillowed on the harsh needles of a juniper, but he was too weary to shift his position. He lay there, panting, while the others wandered about picking their fill of the big berries which they could strip from the bushes in handfuls.

Finally, sated, Marilla stopped in the shade of a low tree to enjoy the view. Seth came up behind her.

"Those might be the everlasting hills 'from whence cometh my help,' might n't they?" he said, looking at the bold curves on the horizon.

"If only the geologists had n't robbed our hills of their everlastingness," said Marilla, lost in thought. Through the minds of both passed the poet's words: —

> "The hills are shadows and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go."

Over Marilla's mood of happiness fell a shadow. She wandered off as though casually returning to her search for berries, but as soon as she had gone a short distance from Seth she bent unseeing over the bushes, fighting herself. She was conscious of a sudden immense distaste for life. Half-formed thoughts surged through her brain. "Seth and I live and die and that 's the end.

Sickening, meaningless world! Beauty for nothing! Sunshine and flowers for nothing! How can I bear it?"

She was frightened at the intensity of her feeling. What was happening to her? Other people seemed to live happily with less than she had. Why could not she? She moved blindly through the warm sunshine on the hillside, despairing of ever regaining the easy poise of her youth. In vain she besought that help from without which has its only source within.

Her feet fell unconsciously into the groove of the upward path, and she followed it, passing into the cool shade of the pines. In the shelter of the trees, her pulse gradually slowed and she waited the coming of the men with recovered quiet.

When they overtook her, she slipped her arm in Seth's for a moment. He looked at her, grateful for the gesture of affection. For many months now it had been he who gave expression to tenderness and she who withheld it. She smiled at him and gave his arm a quick pressure before she turned to follow Albert, who was lagging more and more and stopping often to lean against a convenient tree or to rest on a rock beside the path.

"This cane 's a great idea," he said, as he stumbled along, steadying himself with its help. "But I think you 've deceived me about the height of this mountain. We must have gone a mile in the air already."

"The ledges are just above here," laughed Seth. "When we get there, you 'll begin to feel as if you were almost at the top."

"Don't let him encourage you too much," warned Marilla. "It 's some distance yet. But persistence and slow going will conquer any New Hampshire mountain."

As they neared the top, the cane tapped on the skeleton

rocks of the path from which the light soil had been loosened by climbers and washed away by the rains. The trees were smaller than those lower down, and their spreading roots, gripping the rocks as an anaconda might grip the body of his victim, showed here and there bare and bleached, stripped of the protecting earth. The trunks were twisted as if the fierce winds of the winter had bent and beaten them into abnormal shapes, and the irregular branches were dwarfed and broken.

The vista widened rapidly as they came out on the gray ledges near the top. The rock had the smoothness of a lava flow, broken occasionally by hollows where dirt could lodge and the uprooting wind enter with difficulty. Moss and berry bushes filled these cups in the granite when they were deep enough to hold the moisture of the winter snow and the summer rain. The trail, marked with low cairns, crossed the lichen-covered slopes or followed along the edge of springy beds of green moss, against which the blueberries on their lustrous-leaved bushes stood out like tiny jewels.

The sun shone brilliantly, but the wind was strong enough to cool the three quickly after their hot walk in the woods. Albert paid no attention to the widening view, but pushed on without resting. He was seized with the mountaineer's enthusiasm to reach the top, heedless of incidental pleasures on the way. Seth's and Marilla's climbing shoes allowed them to walk easily and securely on the rocks, but Albert had to brace himself with the cane, and even so slipped perilously now and then.

The rocks at the summit were bare, save for the indomitable lichen which finds nourishment even in New Hampshire granite and for the few tiny flowers which filled the crevices with their beauty.

Albert went up the last few yards with a rush and stopped at the top, exhausted but triumphant. He stood

panting on the great rocky peak, his eyes taking in the broad sweep.

"Why don't we all live near mountains!" he gasped. "It 's got New Jersey beat by a mile."

Marilla buttoned her sweater and seated herself just a little below the top where she could look off and yet be sheltered from the wind. Her eyes searched the earth below, with its pattern of field and forest, its shining lakes and tiny white farmhouses, its little clustering villages and strips of winding road, with an affection which astonished her. How was it possible for a human being to love the insensate earth as she did? It made no response to her emotion. There it lay, smiling in the sun, darkening under the shadow of the speeding clouds, asking nothing, giving nothing. Yet, like the nature worshipers of old, she felt, in every fibre of her being, her helpless dependence upon it. Were its silence and its calm rebuking her feverish unrest and measuring her transient emotions against the greatness of eternity? For the moment she felt at peace with herself, lost in consciousness of the majesty of mere being.

Seth had pulled the bag from his shoulders and tossed it on the rock beside him as he and Albert took in the circle of the landscape.

"We 're too hot to stand in this wind any longer," he said in a few minutes. "Let 's go down where Marilla is sitting till we 're cooler. We 'll come up later and I 'll show you which mountains are which."

Albert was already shivering a little. His shirt felt like a cold and clammy sheath about him and he was quite ready to follow Seth down the slope. The two seated themselves beside Marilla, leaning against the rock, their feet extended in front of them, looking off at the panorama.

Albert's first loud exclamations of admiration sub-

sided and they sat in a silence broken only by an occasional word. For a time the men smoked, then they put their pipes away. The warmth of the sun and the rest for their tired muscles soothed them to drowsiness. Far below they could see a hawk flying in wide circles over an open field. The bird swung round and round, tilting the angle of its outstretched wings as it moved, but neither flapping nor beating the air.

"I never understood how a hawk did that until I rode in an airplane," observed Seth, meditatively. "The wind is that bird's motive power. It 's as good as gasoline, and does n't get used up."

"No, but it gives out all the same," answered Albert, derisively. "Guess you never went sailing on the ocean, as I have, without an auxiliary engine!"

"The hawk can sit on a tree and wait for the wind to rise," suggested Seth, lazily. "What do you say, Marilla? Shall we eat?"

After lunch the men spent some time on the summit identifying peaks and locating the lakes and villages on a map which Seth had brought along. Marilla stayed behind, watching the landscape change as the sun sank lower and the lengthening shadows engulfed the precipices below. As she dreamed, without the sharpness of thought, over the lifted hills and the resting valleys she seemed to lose something of her tension. When the men came back, Seth rejoiced to see her tranquil look as she welcomed them.

"Have you ever seen a view like this upside down?" she asked Albert.

"Well, hardly," he exclaimed, throwing up his hands in protest. "I can't capsize the landscape, and I have n't stood on my head for twenty years."

Marilla laughed. "You ought not to let yourself get out of practice, like that!" she said, rebukingly. "But

actually all you have to do is to put your head down and look between your legs. It 's harmless and very rewarding."

Albert submissively did as he was told, but soon lifted his face reddened by the stooping position. "It 's great!" he said, and ducked again. Marilla lay on her side and tilted her head that she might get the same effect.

"It 's like curtain after curtain of some mysterious woven material," she said, as she looked. "Much lovelier and more fairylike than when you 're right side up, don't you think?"

Albert stood up again, aglow with a combination of enthusiasm and deranged circulation. "I 'll certainly go back to New Jersey and get the whole population to stand on their heads," he said with energy. "I don't know what effect it would have on the sand flats, but it probably would improve the ocean."

"Had n't we better burn these papers and boxes?" asked Marilla as Seth stooped to pick up the lunch bag.

She had carefully gathered the luncheon débris in a pile after they had eaten and kept it from blowing away by laying a stone on top. Seth lighted a projecting piece of waxed paper. It burned briskly. He stirred the wedged papers with his foot occasionally until nothing was left but light curled sheets of black and gray, ready at the first touch of wind to crumble into fine ashes and blow away. They watched the tiny flames, fascinated, turning their backs to the great sweep of the landscape.

The way down proved more difficult for the novice than the way up. His shoes slipped on the rocks and his knees ached under the constant strain of bracing himself.

Marilla and Seth adapted themselves to his slow pace, which they did not have to urge upon him this time. They followed him through the woods, enjoying the

luxury of physical tiredness which stops short of exhaustion.

As they came to the fork of the path leading to the hermit's shack, Albert in the lead pointed with his cane, triumphantly. "What did I tell you!" he said. "See those fresh footprints coming back? That 's no berry picker's track. The hermit's best girl has been spending the day with him."

In the mud were the marks of the same small heels they had seen in the morning, but this time the shoes were pointed in the other direction.

"Judging from the looks, the young lady can't be very far ahead of us," went on Albert. "Those prints were not made more than fifteen minutes ago."

"You must be a Sherlock Holmes," said Seth. "Fortunately, it 's none of our business, anyway."

He spoke lightly, but Marilla could see that he was disturbed. He had no sentiment about the hermit, she knew, but he had a strong dislike of the illicit.

When they reached the car Albert climbed in with a groan.

"I believe my shoulder is even lamer than my knees," he said. "All the result of bracing myself with the cane down that steep trail."

"You 're better off to distribute your aches than to have them all in one place," said Seth, cheerfully, as he started the engine. "You 'll be all right in a day or two."

"A day or two!" groaned Albert. "Does it take as long as that?" Then he added as he settled himself comfortably, "But I 'd do it again if I had the chance. Great experience!"

The car, moving rapidly round a bend, came suddenly upon a girl, walking beside the road.

"There she is!" cried Albert. "What 'd I tell you?"

The girl did not turn her head when they came near. As the car went by Marilla saw in a flash, first, that the sharp heels of the shoes treading the dry surface of the road were covered with mud, and, second, that their wearer was Ruby Fox, the girl with the child's mind, who had become a woman.

Albert was triumphant at the confirmation of his suspicions, but his companions said little. Marilla glanced up the mountain side where the little farmhouse crouched on the steep slopes. Was this the clue to Mrs. Fox's gnawing anxiety? Had the dread of this forced Jim Sanborn to drag his feeble limbs down the mountain and bring the girl home from her wanderings? Marilla felt a pang of admiration for the stoic endurance of the poor woman whose drawn face had haunted her. It reminded her of Mrs. Rogers' description of a neighbor with many troubles: "She 's the kind when there 's something that 's got to be done, does it and does n't make any talk or fuss about it." Moral character, often stern and forbidding, but bracing to weaker wills — that was the New England inheritance of Mrs. Fox.

Albert questioned Seth about the farms they were passing. As they drew near the Borek home, Thaddeus, who had been one of Marilla's pupils, was out in the field bringing in the last of the hay. His mother, in a long skirt, with a cloth tied round her head, walked beside the wagon, pitchfork in hand, and tossed great bundles of the fragrant timothy on the load. Seth stopped the car a moment, so that they might watch her. Marilla waved her hand to Thaddeus, who smiled and waved in return, but Mrs. Borek did not look their way. She stood, four-square on the solid earth, her feet bare and brown, her shoulders and arms firm and beautiful as though modeled by a sculptor, lifting the speared hay on her fork, and, when the load was safely balanced on the top, pulling out

the shining tines and stooping once more over the rounded heaps gathered by the rake.

"She looks like an immigrant woman I once saw landing in New York from Ellis Island," said Albert, watching her with admiration. "She came off the boat carrying a great bundle on her head, and leading two little children by the hand. She was splendid. I thought to myself, here 's the kind of woman we need to take the place of our anæmic flappers. But the experts tell me her children won't be any more able to carry loads on their heads than the hundred-pound secretary in my office. We do something degenerating to these foreigners. Too soft a civilization, I suppose."

"I think the adaptability of our immigrants is the moral of that story," said Marilla. "We don't need to have our loads carried on the heads of women. Trucks can do that. A hay-loader could do a better and quicker job than Mrs. Borek. What we 've got to have is not amazons and coolies but delicate fingers for machines. I hope Mrs. Borek's girls will refuse to get in the hay. There are a hundred more pressing jobs waiting for them."

"What good will the Poles be on the New Hampshire farms if they lose all their muscle?" asked Albert, as his eyes followed the loaded wagon on its way down the field.

"They 're bringing us beauty and energy and optimism," exclaimed Marilla. "A lot of our people have lost their grip, and they 'll take fresh courage from these virile peasant folk. I 'm not worried about their muscles. They 'll be there if they 're needed."

"You 've sure got a booster for the Poles in your family," said Albert facetiously to Seth. "If the old hermit back there was all that was left of New Hampshire's pioneer stock, I might pin my faith to the Polacks

as she does. But so long as you and some of the other fellows I know from the Granite State, not to speak of the little lady herself, are on the job, I 'm not going to preach any funeral oration for this part of the country."

## CHAPTER IX

THE next morning Albert departed, leaving jocose messages for the hermit and his girl. He ascribed to her rural inexperience Marilla's lack of response to his parting humor.

He was thankful the fates had saved him from a small-town life. Lovell was a good enough place to visit, but as to living there! A really energetic man like himself needed a larger field. He 'd think Seth would feel pretty restless, cooped up in a little place like that, though he was certainly doing finer weaving than any of the big city factories. He breathed a sigh of relief as he left the last of the mills behind him and drew near the spreading congeries of cities where he made his home. The tension of mind and body of which he was conscious as he approached the Grand Central Station only exhilarated him. He was one of the growing multitude of Americans who feel the challenge of the big city and go out armed to meet it. The quiet New Hampshire hills and the fields warmed by the August sun and wet with its rains had no hold on him. They ceased to exist for him as he hurried with the pushing hundreds to find standing room in the Times Square shuttle and keep an important engagement.

Albert had hardly left the house before Marilla was starting in the automobile for the Sanborn farm. She and Seth had talked the night before about what was best to do for the family in this emergency.

"I 'd keep away," said Seth. "If she 'd wanted you to know her troubles she 'd have told you or Amelia. You 've got to respect the reserve of a proud woman like that."

But Marilla objected.

"I think Mrs. Fox ought to be told what we saw. She may have suspicions and not really be sure. I've had experience with such children in school. Perhaps I could help her."

"Well," said Seth finally, "I would n't do it. She has a secret she wants to keep. I'd let her keep it. I'm not so sure that an honest confession is good for the soul. Sometimes people are more self-respecting if they have n't confessed too freely."

Marilla looked at him for a moment, startled. Was this the explanation of the silence that was falling between them in the deeper intimacies of life? Was he perhaps responsible as well as she? The dignity of self-control demands that even grief must have its moderation. To the poised, unrestrained sorrow expresses no magnitude of loss, quiet endurance pays the only tribute worthy of love.

"You don't understand," she said coldly. "I know I can help her and it's my duty to try."

Seth, disconcerted by her tone, said no more. The little differences that creep into every married life were augmented out of all proportion in theirs by the completeness with which they were thrown upon each other in the semi-isolation in which they lived. Their power to wound each other was growing greater than their power to bless. They parted, each carrying a sore for which neither felt able to blame the other.

As Marilla drove along the River Road, her face wore the sombre expression Seth had learned to dread. Her thoughts vibrated between a vague resentment at Seth to which she could give no name and a hot disgust with her own nature which, as the years passed, was bringing her into increasing disharmony with life and love.

One moment she analyzed her emotions with the cold scrutiny of the scientist; the next she yielded to them

with a completeness against which her intelligence revolted in vain. Was this something within her that could not say Seth was enough, this passionate longing that lay beyond the control of her will — was this the same living force that drove the tree roots into the granite rocks with power to split them, that spread verdure from pole to pole wherever a seed could find lodgment, and wrestled stubbornly in the jungle to bring the flower to the upper sunshine and air? If so, she need not scourge herself. Who was she to conquer in the brief span of a life the deep impulse to recreate which had passed through untold thousands of yearning women to bring her own being into existence?

The day was damp and the landscape veiled in a mist which thinned as the car climbed the side of the mountain. When Marilla reached the Sanborn farm, the sun's warmth had dried the upper levels and nothing of the morning's moisture was visible save straggling wisps of cloud in the valley, rising slowly as if in response to a summons from above.

Marilla's knock at the door brought a few faint words she could hardly distinguish. "Who 's that?"

She recognized Mrs. Sanborn's voice coming from the inner bedroom. She called through the open window, "It 's Mrs. Walton. I 've brought something for you. May I come in?"

The voice gave assent and she opened the unlatched front door. The stove was cold and the breakfast dishes unwashed. Marilla crossed the kitchen and entered the room where Mrs. Sanborn lay in bed. The room was dark, partly from the shade of the vines outside, but still more from the shutters which had been drawn across the lower half of the window and successfully excluded both light and air. The old woman was huddled under a patchwork quilt, her hair untidily spread over the

pillow. Her face seemed whiter than Marilla remembered it, but her eyes had the same look of fierce energy.

"Jim 's haulin' some firewood for my daughter. That 's why she ain't come over yet to clean up and fix me. Your sister-in-law, she can't only come onct a week. She 's comin' to-morrow. That kitchen must be in an awful mess. Jim ain't no hand to pick up after himself."

"I was riding up this way," said Marilla, "and I brought along something warm for you to wear in bed."

She opened the package she carried in her hand, and took out a lavender woolen bed-jacket, daintily feather-stitched and fastened together with ribbons. She felt a little apologetic about its delicate color as she laid it on the ugly quilt in the bare, bleak little room, but she was startled to see the sudden softness in the eyes of the old woman as she caught sight of its dainty folds.

"I ain't never seen anything so pretty," she said. She slowly drew one crippled hand from under the bedclothes and felt the texture. Her touch was a caress.

"It will look lovely with your white hair," suggested Marilla. "That 's why I chose that color. I want your daughter to put it on you. I think I 'll go over to her house and bring her back with me."

The sick woman's expression became suddenly disturbed.

"You 'd better not go. You 'll get lost," she said, sharply.

"Oh, no," answered Marilla, reassuringly. "I can't wander far out of the way."

"You 'd better not go," insisted the old woman, with the same air of anxiety. "She 's coming soon. You set in the chair in the kitchen and she 'll be along in a few minutes."

"I 'll step outside and see if she 's in sight," said Marilla, finally.

"Don't go far," the feeble voice pursued her. "You 'll get lost."

"She 's evidently in the secret," thought Marilla. "She does n't want me to see anything to rouse my suspicions."

She felt uncertain what to do. She did not want to distress the old woman, nor to force herself on Mrs. Fox. Yet she was eager to offer her help. She had not taught for years in country schools without accumulating experience that might be of use to the afflicted mother.

"Seth would n't do it, but I 'm going to," she said to herself as if defying opposition. She walked along the worn path that led from the door.

She crossed a wide field and entered the woods. As she walked along she heard the sound of chopping and saw, not far from the path, a man in faded overalls cutting fallen timber. He was small and furtive-looking, with his face partially obscured by a visored cap which he had pulled down over his forehead. He did not lift his head as she went by, but Marilla had an uncomfortable feeling that he was looking at her, after she had passed, like some sly, sharp-eyed animal on the watch.

"That must be Mr. Fox," she thought with a feeling of sharp dislike. "No wonder his wife's face looks haunted."

The path crossed a second field and then cut through woods to a clearing where stood a mellow old barn which must have been there for generations. Over the cellar hole of the original farmhouse, which had burned or fallen in, was built a story-and-a-half house with the ugly lines and shabby construction of modern cheap building. The single window under the ridgepole was

covered with a homemade screen with heavy meshes such as is used for sifting gravel. It had evidently been freshly fastened there, for a long ladder, with a hammer hanging on its top rung, still leaned against the side of the house.

Marilla walked to the side door. Her footsteps made no sound on the grass. Through the window she caught sight of Mrs. Fox locking an inner door which led up an enclosed stair to the second floor, and putting the key in her pocket.

"It 's all right now, Pa," she heard her call through an open window on the other side of the room. "You dump the wood there, and I 'll go over to Mother's."

Marilla stepped to the door. "Good morning, Mrs. Fox," she said. "I 've just been to see your mother. I thought I 'd come over to see you, too."

The woman was so startled that she had to catch the door knob to keep herself from falling. She turned first white and then a painful red that passed quickly and left her white again.

Marilla had an obscure feeling of shame. Was it a mistaken kindness to seek the confidence of this proud suffering woman?

"There 's only bitterness in such secrecy," she reassured herself.

"I was just starting for the other house," stammered Mrs. Fox. "Would you like to set down a minute first?"

Marilla took a sudden resolve. Let her say what she had to say here, in the bare unplastered room with its skeleton supports exposed to view.

"I saw something the other day I felt you ought to know," she said as she seated herself. "I 've taught so many years that I know the troubles mothers have with their young people, and how much help and watching the children need."

Mrs. Fox listened in a stony silence. Marilla fumbled for her words.

"Of course I have not spoken to anyone else about it, but did you know that Ruby walked alone last Sunday to the shack in the Hermit Woods?"

The mother drew a stealthy breath as though controlling her body with her will. She turned whiter than before.

"Ruby likes to walk. She goes all over the mountain. She brings me wild flowers," she managed to say.

Marilla hesitated. Did she want to be taken into the confidence of this pale woman with tragedy in every angle of her worn and wasted body? But she had gone too far now to stop.

"I think I should try if I were you to keep her away from those woods. It 's no place for a young girl to go alone."

Mrs. Fox still looked at her without speaking.

"Ruby has such a feeling for beauty," she went on, "that she must be protected from ugliness and kept always with beautiful things. If she understood as we do, that 's what she 'd choose, too."

Some throttling grip in Mrs. Fox seemed to relax. The tears rolled down her cheeks. She did not appear to notice them and made no motion to wipe them away. Her eyes clung to Marilla's face.

"Ruby is such a good child," she said, brokenly. "When she 's with me, she 's quiet and tries to do all she can to help me. But something comes over her — and she runs away. God only knows what happens to her when she 's gone. Pa has helped me find her, but he 's old and he can't do it much longer." Marilla noticed that she said nothing of her husband. She had heard that he hung around the town a good deal and was seldom at home.

She started a word of sympathy, but the reserve of the woman, once broken through, was like impounded waters whose dam has given way. The repressions of years, against which Marilla's words of consolation were but chips on the flood, must find release. She took the key out of her pocket and showed it to Marilla.

"When I have to go out, I lock her upstairs. Sunday she jumped out of the window. To-day, Pa put up something to keep her in. I do the best I can. She makes her rugs up there. I 'm not cruel to her. She 's all I have."

The poor face was distorted with grief. She held her hands tightly clasped, as if in an effort to control herself. "You 're a happy woman," she said, her eyes swollen with tears. "You have no children to torture you. You don't have to stay awake nights and wonder whether you have strength to live through another day."

For a moment Marilla was too startled to speak. Her cheeks flushed painfully.

"Each heart knows its own pain," she managed to say. "We must think what can be done."

The woman wondered at the sudden change of expression. Did this rich and fortunate woman carry some secret sorrow? Was her husband unkind to her? She knew only too well what that unhappiness meant! But her own mounting misery shut out the thought of another's possible tragedy.

"You were a teacher and you saw children sick in the head like my Ruby. Maybe you can tell me what to do with her. I punish her, but it does no good. I try to keep her with me every minute, but my mother needs me and the farm needs me and sometimes she gets away."

"You 're a good woman," said Marilla, touching her worn and calloused hands. "Your Ruby is not bad, she 's just a child that never grew up. You can't scold her and

blame her for being a child. Just watch over her and protect her from hurting herself as you keep a baby from burning itself on the stove. She does n't ever mean to do wrong. Give her things to do that make her happy, like the rug making. Keep her as busy as you can. Perhaps it 'll be easier to take care of her as she gets older."

Marilla was startled by the sudden anguish in the other's face.

"Oh, Mrs. Walton," she said in a smothered voice, holding Marilla's hand in both of hers, "what would happen to her if I should die? My poor old father and mother could not look out for her, and my husband — " She stopped for a breath, then went on, "Sometimes I can't sleep at night, worrying. I have a bad heart, and when I 'm frightened for Ruby it seems to jump out of my body."

Marilla took a sudden resolve. She had forced herself into this woman's tragedy. She could not slip out again without assuming part of the burden whose confession she had invited.

"Mrs. Fox," she said, and her voice trembled a little, "I promise that if anything happens to you I will see that Ruby is cared for, as if she were my own."

The woman stared at her, hardly daring to believe. Then in the relief from haunting anxiety, more unnerving than grief itself, she dropped her head in Marilla's lap, sobbing like an uncontrolled child. Marilla bent over her, soothing and reassuring her, but in her own face there was none of the joy of giving. The ardent impulse was spent with the words and she was left with a fresh depression. When Mrs. Fox lifted her head, they looked at each other as two souls might whose wings have touched. The curtain between them would never rise again, but for that long moment they saw deep into

each other's hearts, recognizing the enduring bond of spiritual kinship.

They walked together to the Sanborn farm, talking of ordinary things. At the door Marilla said, "I will not go in," and held out her hand for parting.

Mrs. Fox took the hand quietly. The mask was slipping back over her face.

"Good-bye," she said. "I hope you can come again."

"Thank you," answered Marilla as quietly as she. "Say good-bye to your mother for me."

The figure of Mr. Fox stayed in Marilla's memory as her car sped down the hill. On her return through the woods with Mrs. Fox there had been no sign of the woodchopper. He had vanished as silently and completely as a wild creature in panic retreat from the sight of man. Marilla wondered how Mrs. Fox could bear the unavailing regret at having bound herself to that paltry, hunted-looking being? How reconcile herself to the consequence of her own mad action? We can forgive those who injure us and even forget the injury. But from the wrongs we do ourselves there is no escape. We are judge, aggressor, and victim alike, condemned to the painful companionship of the three.

The iron strength of her Puritan forefathers had passed into Mrs. Fox. Who would guess, seeing her parting with Marilla, the storm of emotion which had shaken that frail body so short a time before? No wonder the Poles thought New Englanders a cold and unfeeling people! Children of an impulsive and outspoken race, how could they know that sorrow is the more agonizing for repression, like the hidden captive beneath the boy's cloak tearing at his vitals?

If only, thought Marilla, happiness similarly suppressed could gain an equal intensity! The reserved and the inexpressive, penalized by their nature, seem always

to have been destined to suffer more and to rejoice less than others. But Marilla, knowing well the people to whom she belonged, felt no impulse to repudiate her inheritance. Whatever it brought her of joy or sorrow would be rightly hers. Better the bitterness of her own nature than the easy joys of those to whom life wore a different aspect.

## CHAPTER X

MARILLA seemed to find a happiness in association with her Polish friends that she found with no one else. Their peasant directness and simplicity rested a mind torn by subtle and conflicting emotions.

She went often to Ewa's little tenement to hover over Marya and watch her ways, more absorbed and interested in the child's development than the young mother herself. To Ewa a baby, even her own, was a commonplace of life, but to Marilla the child was a miracle of potentialities to be guarded and cultivated with the accumulated wisdom of the race. At first Ewa was a little restive at a devotion that seemed to her excessive. After Marilla's visits she frequently complained to her husband of the queer ways of American women. But in time Marilla's genuine affection made her coming not only endurable, but something to look forward to with pleasure.

When the little girl was a year old, a second child was expected. Marilla offered to take Marya for the first two weeks of the baby's life, until Ewa was strong enough to care for both children. Mrs. Zabka protested and Ewa hesitated. How could they know what strange things Americans might do to a child? Ewa was not afraid, since Marya had been baptized and could not be made into a Protestant in two weeks, but Mrs. Zabka, full of suspicion, thought something else to her injury might be tried. Ewa, though she would not have admitted it to her mother, secretly wanted to please Marilla. The selfish vanity which had drawn her to her teacher in the first place was merging into something different to which she could give no name. She only knew that in some dim way she was sorry for Marilla and wanted to

make her happy. After violent words between the mother and daughter, little Marya, with her bundle of small clothes, was carried to Marilla's house by Stanislaw early one morning in September.

"Ewa going to have anudda baby bimeby," said Stanislaw in smiling explanation as Marilla opened the door.

He carried the baby upstairs and put her in the canopied rocking cradle which Marilla, in anticipation, had brought down from the attic a few days before.

"Nice for baby," he said, looking at it with admiration. He touched it lightly with his hand to make it rock. His was a pleasant, good-humored face, and he had been a kind husband to Ewa and a loving father. Marilla sometimes thought he was fonder of the baby than of its mother, though he frequently expressed his disappointment that Marya was not a boy.

After he had gone, Marilla took Marya into the dressing room to show her to Seth. They played with the fair-haired, round-faced, placid little creature until it was time for breakfast. Seth carried the child downstairs and they tied her into a chair, where she sat smiling at them, energetically waving a rattle which Marilla had fastened to her wrist.

When Seth went, Marilla kissed him good-bye hurriedly, so preoccupied with the things that must be done for her new charge that she forgot to go to the door and wave to him as she was accustomed to do.

She had written the directions Ewa had given her as to what must be done for the baby, and had mentally added many others acquired through years of experience in helping busy women care for their children. She looked forward to giving little Marya, for two weeks, the most devoted care that could be lavished on a baby.

With an excitement such as she had not felt for years Marilla carried the child upstairs and got everything ready for her bath. On a convenient low table she laid out clean clothes, a soft wash cloth and towel, a powder can and salves for chafed skin. The water in the bathtub was drawn with an anxious air, and its temperature tested as carefully as if in preparation for a delicate chemical reaction. The baby had, meanwhile, begun to fret, and Marilla brought her into the bathroom and began to undress her. The little arms flapped so vigorously that she had difficulty in drawing off the sleeves, and the child's protests during the disrobing process became so strenuous that Marilla was flushed and nervous before she finally had the little pink body ready to put in the tub. The moment she felt the warm water, Marya's outcries ceased and she splashed and gurgled, sucked the wash cloth, and tried with squeals of joy to seize the elusive soap. Marilla bent over the tub, laughing with the child, soaping and sponging her, and washing, as painstakingly as the baby would allow, the folds of her skin, the creases behind her ears, and the little clenched fists which held the wash cloth in a tight grip and would not let it go. Marya howled vigorously when she was taken from the water, but Marilla gave her the powder can to hold and that seemed, for the moment, to content her. She struggled to pull off the cap and to bite holes in its hard surface with her new little teeth, while Marilla was drying her and putting on her clothes.

After the child was dressed, Marilla fed her and put her to bed, kissing the soft cheek and the fat little neck before she laid her down. She rocked the cradle, once or twice, with a tender lingering touch. The child looked at her a moment with heavy eyes. Then the lids fell, and almost before Marilla had opened the window and closed

the door Marya was quietly asleep, with one hand clutching the knitted blanket that covered her.

As she passed the pier glass in her room, Marilla caught a glimpse of herself. Her hair was disheveled, the front of her dress damp and wrinkled, and her brow furrowed with anxiety. She laughed a little at her appearance. "How does a mother with ten manage, I wonder?" she thought. In a happy flutter she returned to clear up the confusion left by the bath. It was a full hour before everything was tidy again and she could take a rest. She threw herself on her bed with a sigh of exhaustion and lay there, listening intently for sounds from the room where the baby lay. But the silence held, and she herself fell into a doze, dreaming that her own child slept beside her, cradled on her arm.

She woke with a start, hearing a stir in the next room. Her dream faded before the intensity of the reality. There was no time for the pang of passionate disappointment as she sprang to her feet and hurried to open the door. Marya, rosy and sweet with sleep, looked at her, smiling. She put her hand on the little head, covered with fair curls, and found it damp.

"I put too many blankets over you, darling," she said, full of self-reproach as she picked the child up. "I must never do that again."

Late in the afternoon, Stanislaw came to tell Marilla that he had a son, born an hour before. His face shone with pride. Marilla asked him how Ewa was.

"Oh, she all right," he said, carelessly. He added, with a boastful air, "The boy, he want hold my finger." He held out his finger to show it to Marilla in proof. "Big boy. Going do lots work."

Marilla smiled appreciatively, and brought Marya downstairs for him to see. He tossed the child in his arms, saying things in Polish which Marilla could not

understand. Then he handed her back to Marilla.

"You take good care her," he said, as if in clumsy thanks, and went away.

At the end of the week Marilla took Marya to see the new brother. Ewa's pride in a son was as great as Stanislaw's, but her affection was for Marya. She welcomed the child with a tenderness that seemed to surprise her as much as it did Marilla. Was Ewa's meagre little soul, Marilla wondered, to be remade by the great experience of motherhood? She could hardly be persuaded to let the little girl be taken away again, and only yielded when her husband insisted.

Marilla found herself growing unexpectedly attached to Stanislaw. She knew his code of ethics was not that by which she lived, but familial loyalty seemed to have developed from the tumult of a sensuous youth, and his unfailing daily visits to Marya, his devotion to his family, his cheerful readiness to work his hardest for the sake of his children, did much to soften her disapproval and to make her tolerant of the workings of a tradition and background so different from her own.

Seth had the highest admiration for Stanislaw's ability. "He 's a tremendous worker, and he knows how to manage men. I 've got him to promise to go to night school this winter. When his English is a little better, we are going to make him foreman of the sorting room. Mark my words, some day Stanislaw Lewenopski is going to be a leading citizen of this town."

Marilla, watching Marya as she sat on a rug in the sunny yard, pulling vigorously at her tiny shoes, thought what that would mean to the child. She felt the importance of Stanislaw's success only as it served his children. Did people judge Seth's success in the same way? Was his quiet, unstinting service to his community without meaning because the cradle in his house was empty?

Marilla got up suddenly and carried the baby indoors to be fed.

When the two weeks were over, Marilla took Marya back to her home. No one saw the tears she shed as she got the child ready to go. She repeatedly kissed the little creature's cream-colored cheeks, with just a hint of pink under the skin, as though long starved for such caressing. The baby laughed and caught at her hair with its plump hands.

Marilla laid Marya in her mother's arms without a word. She turned to look at the new baby on the bed, feeling the dreaded rise of tears. She controlled herself almost immediately, but not before Ewa had caught the marks of weeping. The girl wondered what had made her cry. What could she be sad about? Ewa was puzzled, but she could see that this woman, so rich and fortunate, suffered in giving her back her child.

"You are good mother to Marya," she said, and surprised herself by adding, "She big and fat. Any time you want Marya, you take her."

Marilla shook her head.

"Thank you, Ewa," she said, "but Marya is better at home with her own father and mother."

That evening Seth watched Marilla uneasily. The animation of the past two weeks was gone and she had a look of exhaustion. She talked hurriedly about the new weaving to which she had of late shown nothing but indifference.

As they started to go in from the porch where they had been sitting, Seth said, "I 'm so glad to have you to myself again. The last fortnight I 've only had what little time Marya left. Just think how much more of yourself you have to give your husband than most wives!"

Marilla could not answer for a moment. She knew what he was trying to express, but her inner rebellion

refused the comfort he held out to her. Her nature, feeding on itself, was losing the power to merge in another's life. She murmured some half-articulate words of contradiction and went indoors, hating herself, yet feeling as if her heart were too paralyzed to respond.

Seth followed her with a sense of shrinking loneliness. He told himself that he had failed Marilla. Such a nature as his, shut in and solitary, had nothing to offer a woman. How could he have imagined that he, who through years had found it easy to live without love, could satisfy a person like Marilla? Let him do his work, and ask from her only such joy as she could freely and happily give.

## CHAPTER XI

One noon Amelia came in for a few minutes after a long round over rough country roads only partially cleared of snow to find Marilla drooping by the fireplace, an unopened book on her lap. Her whole manner was listless and indifferent.

Amelia greeted her cheerfully.

"How comfortable and restful this seems," she said. "I 've been fighting snowdrifts till I 'm tired out."

Marilla got up to help her with her coat and drew a deep Windsor chair up to the fire for her. Amelia seated herself and pulled off her driving gloves.

"I wish I 'd had you with me this morning," she began. "All the invalids are getting better and it looks as if before long there 'd be no more need of a nurse in Lovell."

"Tell me where you went," said Marilla, rousing herself for the moment.

Amelia related the incidents of the day, both humorous and touching, without eliciting much response from Marilla. She finally fell silent herself and sat for a time enjoying the warmth of the fire and the sight of the pointed flames licking round the logs. While she talked, she had been observing Marilla, and she glanced covertly at her now. The younger woman's overcast face and apathetic air were bewildering to one who had known her before her marriage. They stirred Amelia to a sudden resolve.

In her nurse's code an emotional outbreak was something to be avoided rather than encouraged. Too often she had seen spiritual exhaustion follow the storm, and the clouds of weakness, raised by the tempest, refuse to dispel. Her faithful habit had been to follow the

doctor's guidance in the physical care of her patients, confident that the healthy mind would regain control of the body once the disease was conquered. But here was a sick mind that was no longer master of itself. She ought to cut deep, like the wise surgeon, into the hidden sore of Marilla's heart. Healing could be left to the living forces within the sufferer herself, but the wound must be opened to the sunlight and the air.

"Marilla," she said with calm decision, "do you ever think how many women there are who have, not only the same sorrow that you have, but other and far worse griefs to bear and yet don't give way to their disappointment as you do?"

Marilla looked up startled.

"Of course I know that most people have some heartache," she answered, stirred suddenly to self-defense.

Amelia went on as if Marilla had not spoken.

"Do you think that many women get through life without longing for the happiness for which you long? They just are n't women if they do. But most of them have courage and won't let their deprivation spoil their lives, or," she added with emphasis, "the lives of those about them."

Marilla flushed.

"I suppose you mean Seth," she said.

"Yes," answered Amelia. "I mean Seth, and many others, too. How much are you helping the rest of us to face life bravely by yielding to grief as you do?"

"You don't know," said Marilla, struggling for self-control, "what such a disappointment means to a wife."

Amelia looked at her with a sternness she seldom showed to anyone.

"You talk of suffering, when you are first in the affection of another human being!" she said in a low voice. "You don't know what suffering is. Seth has given you

his whole heart and yet you are willing to darken his life."

Marilla stared at her, speechless.

"Before you were married," Amelia went on, her tone vibrating, "you were a living person. Now you have ceased to live. How do you justify it?"

Her words carried, not the dart of idle disapproval, but the protest of a strong nature against a yielding to the bitterness of fate.

Marilla's flush deepened. She spoke in a smothered voice.

"How can I plan life when I live from month to month and each month sees another death of hope? There is nothing certain in my life except disappointment."

Amelia watched her closely. Better anger than the hopelessness of dark depression. She went on.

"When you were first married you were happy. You gave Seth a real life with friends and gay activity. Now you have deprived him of the companionship even of the few friends he had before he married. Yet nothing has really changed except yourself. Do you think it 's right to do as you are doing?"

Marilla turned on Amelia almost as though she were facing an enemy.

"I have no heart for anything any more," she answered, bitterly.

Amelia's brave eyes were upon her, and they did not flinch as she said, "That 's because you snatch at joy for yourself. Of course happiness is not found that way."

Marilla looked at her in a strange confusion. The voices of the inner conflict in which she lived spoke in such different terms. She said to herself in agitation that no unmarried woman could understand the battle the childless wife had to fight. Even Amelia's fortitude might prove unequal to the struggle.

"You have your work," she cried. "I wait for what never comes." The tears filled her eyes as she spoke.

Amelia's face saddened. She suppressed a sigh and rose to go. After she had put on her coat and her gloves, she stood a moment at the opened door, her hand on the knob, and said with quiet conviction, "It is n't anything outside that helps. Your own heart must show you the way."

After she had gone, Marilla sat over the fire, wavering between gusts of self-justification and self-pity and moments of cool self-contempt. Was the fight given up too soon? Amelia's last words echoed in her mind. Had she failed to let love be her savior and her guide?

After a time she got up restlessly and walked to the window. The afternoon sunshine was brilliant on the white snow. A sudden impulse seized her to escape from herself and from unhappy thoughts by going out into the shining world which invited her. The four walls of the house seemed, in the tumult of her mood, to close about her like a hampering prison.

Mr. Osburn had stopped her on the street the day before to tell her that her old landlady was no longer well enough to board the teacher. That must mean something serious, for the money from their boarder had become increasingly important as Obadiah's activity on the farm grew less. She would drive out along the familiar road to her first home in Lovell and carry some fruit to the old couple. Mrs. Rogers, she knew, in her severe inexpressive way, was fond of her and would be glad to have her come. She hastily filled a basket with oranges and went out to the garage.

The road, thanks to the fact that many of the Polish farmers along the river had by now acquired automobiles,

was well oiled in the summer and cleared of snow in the winter. Most of the way the black surface lay bare and exposed to the bright sunlight. Occasionally a little drift of white had blown from the ploughed piles of snow at the sides, but Marilla found no more difficulty in driving than she would have had in midsummer.

The farmhouse had the denuded look of winter. The woodbine was stripped of the leaves which in June smothered the porch in green and overran the eaves of the shed, and the tall elms, unveiled and naked, lifted into the still and frosty air a delicate network of branches like the web of a giant spider spun across the blue of the sky.

Before going in, Marilla stood for a moment on the side porch looking at the mountains which stood out, snow-crowned and brilliant, against the clear sky. She remembered with what ecstasy she had watched their cycles of color that first winter. She looked at them today with changed eyes. They seemed even lovelier to her than then, but with a different and more touching beauty. The hills, like herself, could not stay as they were. Did the perpetual change she saw going on about her express the unrest of creation, eternally dissatisfied with itself — or was she reading her own discontent into the quiet face of nature?

Obadiah opened the door and welcomed her cordially. Mrs. Rogers was not in bed, but sitting in a rocking-chair by the kitchen stove, wrapped in a patchwork quilt whose bright pink and blue squares contrasted oddly with her lined and sallow face. She nodded to her visitor and accepted the basket of fruit with a brusque "Set it in the pantry to keep cool" to Obadiah, but Marilla could see that she was pleased.

In reply to Marilla's sympathetic questions she talked in great detail about her symptoms and the medicines she

was taking. She had scant praise for the doctor, but she spoke several times of what an unexpectedly good nurse Obadiah had proved to be.

"Did n't know he had it in him," she said, finally. "Obadiah and I ain't lived together forty years without words. I always told him he was pleasant to them he did n't know and kinda exactin' of me, but I ain't never been sick before, and if I am again I don't want no nurse but him."

"You 'll turn his head, if you tell him such things," laughed Marilla, remembering the sick woman's severity with Obadiah in the days of her vigorous housekeeping, when he tracked dirt into the kitchen.

"She 'll forgit all about it, when she 's up and about," said Obadiah, his kindly eyes on the frail little woman. "She 's scared to scold me now, for fear I 'll cut and run." He got to his feet. "You goin' to stay for a little visit?" he asked Marilla. "I 've got some work out in the barn that 's been waitin' some time to be done, but I ain't liked to leave her alone. You kin call me when you 're ready to go."

He went out through the shed, and they could hear him walk across its creaking floor and through the latched door into the barn.

Marilla took off her fur coat and laid it on a chair.

"My husband gave me that, for Christmas. Is n't it pretty?" she asked.

As she admired it, Mrs. Rogers thought to herself, "I guess he ain't stingy with her, anyway." She had noticed the change that had come over Marilla since the engagement days, when she had gone in and out of the little farmhouse like an embodied spirit of happiness. She had wondered and surmised, but without feeling she had solved the mystery. She felt more drawn to the quiet woman than she had been to the gay girl, but

she could see that marriage had, somehow, sobered and saddened her. She had always heard Mr. Walton highly spoken of, but no one could be sure what a man was like at home from knowing him in the mill. Some men are mean about money, some complain of the food, and others are never pleased with anything their wives do. She could n't say how it was with Marilla's husband. Obadiah told her he was doing wonderful things at the mill these days, but she could see he was n't making his wife happy.

Mrs. Rogers was full of gossip. The neighbors had come in to see her so often since she had been sick that she had had a very social winter. Her old contempt for the Poles, which had been her chief topic of conversation when Marilla first knew her, seemed to have softened. She spoke with gratitude of Mrs. Borek's visits, and of the delicious frozen soup Mrs. Onski had brought her when she was burning with fever and had not been able to eat anything Obadiah could make.

"She had a funny, outlandish name for it," said Mrs. Rogers. " 'Chlodnik,' or some such word. But it tasted as good as if it was real American food." Marilla marveled. Even Mrs. Rogers, then, was not proof against the spirit of neighborliness which bridges the gap of race, language, and religion.

The sick woman went on, "She told me Hedwig was goin' to be married the next week to that Jan Dybiec. They had a grand weddin', two days and a night. We shut our windows tight so 's we would n't be bothered, but we could hear the music just the same. Obadiah said they had great goin's on, the house lighted all night, dancin' till midnight, and eatin' and talkin' and singin' all day."

"Oh, I hope Hedwig 's happy!" exclaimed Marilla.

"Mrs. Onski did n't say anything about that," observed

Mrs. Rogers grimly. "These Polanders don't bother much about the wives bein' happy."

Marilla had no answer. She had noticed with surprise that the Poles she knew seemed to be without much sentiment about marriage. She even thought that some of them loved a brother or sister more than husband or wife. Of course it was difficult to judge without knowing them more intimately and above all speaking their language, but Marilla felt sure, from what she had seen and read, that they were finding the transition from a familial society in Poland to an individualistic one in America very difficult. To some of their inherited traditions they clung tenaciously; others under the pressure of new conditions were being gradually given up. Marilla secretly hoped that good and not evil would be the result of the change. She knew of old that fruit does not necessarily profit by being grafted on an alien stock.

Mrs. Rogers was still full of the details of the wedding festivities, so unlike the decorous and staid ceremonies with which she was familiar. "Mr. Onski told Obadiah the weddin' cost three hundred and fifty dollars, but the guests gave Hedwig near four hundred, so she made some money by it."

Marilla laughed. "Better than that, she got a good husband! Jan is a nice boy, though he 's not so smart as Hedwig. She finished the high school, you know, but he went to work as soon as he was sixteen."

"I don't think much of education for these Polanders," said Mrs. Rogers, with the obstinate shake of the head Marilla remembered so well. She was thin and pale from her sickness, but her blue eyes were as indomitable as ever. "Education spoils more people than it helps. These Polacks get a notion that they 're too good to work when they go as far as the high school. They look for

jobs where they can loaf all the time. Always wantin' to get somethin' for nothin'."

"Not very different from the rest of us, are they?" asked Marilla, a little coldly. Like all true teachers, who are trained to search out and develop the germ of promise in each child, she had something of a mother's sensitiveness about her pupils' failings.

"Well, all I know is," continued Mrs. Rogers, "that the girls, after they 've been to school, won't go barefoot and work in the fields like their mothers, and that the boys, soon as they begin to earn a little money, want to get motor cycles 'stead of buyin' extra cows to make manure for the land." She drew her quilt closer about her as if excluding the possibility of argument about that.

Marilla smiled and changed the subject. "I have n't seen Esther Hilton for a long time. Is she working?"

She could see in memory the fragile, refined little girl, who used to sit in the back row of seats where the winter sun lighted her shining hair.

"Have n't you heard about her?" asked Mrs. Rogers incredulously. "She's keepin' company with that Polander boy, Thaddeus Borek. Her Pa and Ma tried to make her break with him, but she would n't listen to them. You can't always tell about these little mild-lookin' people. She 's set as a mule about it. Says she 's goin' to marry him anyway, and she 'll run away with him and get married by the priest if they make any more trouble. I guess they 've give in, but Mrs. Hilton cries if you say anything to her about it."

"What nonsense!" cried Marilla. "Thaddeus is one of the finest boys I know, good to his mother, works hard at the mill all day, and helps his father every night on the farm. He 's bright, too, and goes to night school, in the winter. I 'd wondered just why he was trying to get more education, but probably Esther 's back of that!"

"No good 'll come of it," said Mrs. Rogers, shaking her head. "Him a Catholic and her a Protestant."

"I guess they can manage that," said Marilla. "Other people have. If the girls of this town don't marry Polish boys, they 'll die old maids. All the native boys go to the city as soon as they finish school. Esther's brother 's gone, you know, and there are n't any boys of Esther's age left. Why, Esther 's the melting pot in action!"

Marilla smiled cheerfully, but Mrs. Rogers' disapproval, though it was silent, was none the less obstinate. After a little more talk, Marilla took her leave. She went to the barn to warn Obadiah that she was going. He had evidently been clearing out the stalls, for the manure pile was giving off fresh clouds of steam into the cold air. Marilla could see two half-grown calves near the fence nuzzling some corn stalks which had been thrown on the ground. The snow crunched crisply under her feet as she walked. The drifts were blown against the big sliding doors so that she had to push hard to open them. She peered in, her eyes still blinded from the glare of sunlight on the snow, trying to make out the objects she could only dimly discern. The head of a horse appeared over the manger of a stall at her left. He seemed to have been recently fed, for he was chewing with steady, powerful motions of his jaws. As she watched, he lowered his head, nosed round in the manger for a moment, and looked up again, his mouth freshly full of hay. Wisps hanging down on either side were being gradually drawn in by his actively working lips and teeth. His mild eyes never left her face as she stood in the slit of the parted doors, the sunlight bright behind her. Behind the stall she could see the stanchions where the two cows stood with their heads fastened between the vertical wooden bars. Obadiah was just tossing hay in front of them as she opened the door. He turned at the sound, and

walked slowly toward her, his pitchfork in his hand.

"Goin'?" he asked. "I 'll be right in. I 'm sure it 's done Emma a heap of good to see you. She 's failed up a good deal sence she was sick. The doctor tells me not to worry myself, but I kinda think I ain't goin' to keep Emma long."

He spoke without outward show of emotion, but Marilla could guess what lay behind his quiet speech. His devotion to his wife had never expressed itself in words, but Marilla had long known that the frail bundled little creature in the kitchen, with her brisk ways and her sharp tongue, tempered now by weakness, held the whole meaning of life for him. Obadiah asked nothing but the chance to tend that sick woman with her shrunken form, her pallid face, her narrow outlook, and her insistence on an impossible and futile cleanliness. Marilla felt a sudden dumbness in her impulse of pity. What word of comfort had she, who demanded everything of life, to offer him? In the doorway she seemed to see, not the wrinkled face of Mr. Rogers, but the face of Seth looking at her in a sad solicitude that held no shadow of reproach.

"You forget how much vitality Mrs. Rogers has," she said, hurriedly. "It won't be many weeks before she 'll be making you take off your shoes again before you come into the kitchen."

They both laughed a little as she closed the doors and turned away. But there was no gayety in her heart. She walked past the house where the two childless old people lived.

" 'We who are about to die salute you,' " she murmured under her breath. Beneath that weathered roof they must long since have learned to be masters over disappointment and preservers of affection. From the world that grudged them much they were going out with heads high and faces to the front. How was her face set?

Amelia's words were like a tragic chorus to her brooding thoughts.

She started the engine of her car and swung out on the main road. As she passed the Onski farm she thought of Mrs. Rogers' growing half-acknowledged tolerance of her Polish neighbors. Marilla had always kept a special interest in the families whose children she had taught in the River School, and she felt her hope of seeing those who were of foreign parentage become true Americans was being realized at last. Jan and Hedwig's children, Thaddeus' and Esther's children, would share an equal responsibility with the descendants of the first settlers in carrying on the life of the town.

Those with Polish blood would add a heritage from Central Europe to that which the pioneers had brought from the British Isles. Whose fault would it be save that of the New Englanders themselves if the ideals of which they were custodian should fail to persist? The plastic clay was at hand. What if it were not from native pits? It could still be moulded, shaped into new forms to fit new uses. Would the potter take up the task or throw away his tools in indifference and disgust?

As Marilla's eyes followed the fleeting form of one luminous object after another, picked out in flashes from the dark by the headlights of the car, she asked herself, "Why am I taking no part in these changes that are going on about me? Just because Seth and I are the end of the line—"

She stopped, self-rebuked, her thought held by the memory of the mill as she had seen it only a few days before, teeming with new machines, new workers, new ideas. There were still some inheritors of the great tradition who lived generously in terms of a future in which they had no personal stake!

## CHAPTER XII

In February, Amelia, to the surprise of everyone, married a Vermont doctor with whom she had done nursing in France during the war. His wife had recently died, leaving him with six young children to bring up. The gossips of Lovell decided that the marriage offered Amelia a career as an underpaid mother's helper, and thought her foolish to leave her salaried position as rural nurse for the arduous task of rearing and educating another woman's children on the small income of a country doctor.

Marilla, observing Amelia's face on her wedding day, knew that they were mistaken. No woman looks at her employer as gray-haired Amelia looked at the big awkward man with the fine hands and the clear eyes who stood at her side during the marriage ceremony. Marilla could see that her new husband was not to Amelia the plain elderly doctor who had dealt for years with pain and weakness, but the glamorous prince of the fairy tale who had at last wakened her heart from its long sleep.

"Why do people always assume," she said to Seth with feeling, when he returned to the parlor after the last of the wedding guests had gone, "that after a woman has passed thirty she is beyond the possibility of romance? Amelia has so much more to love *with* than a girl of twenty!"

"I hope she 'll be happy," said Seth in a matter-of-fact tone as he tossed into the fire a fallen spray of the greens with which the room had been decorated. "Dr. Luke seems to me a pretty good fellow. We 'll certainly miss her in Lovell."

Marilla paled a little as she looked at Seth. That something alienating which had been creeping into their

relation she saw suddenly for what it was. There had been a time when the emotion evoked by the wedding and by Amelia's tremor of happiness would have fed the sources of mutual affection between Seth and herself. They would have seen the new joy in terms of their own, and would not have stood thus, divided, when the wedding guests were gone, but have found themselves in each other's arms. For a dizzy moment she closed her eyes, fancying his arms around her, but when she opened them again he was idly poking the fire, leaning his head on the mantelpiece, looking at the blaze.

"They 'll find it hard to get a nurse who can ever take her place," he said, his eyes still held by the fire.

Her mind was a whirl of thoughts. Why not go up to him in tenderness and snatch at a vanishing joy? Could she rekindle the flame? Better the safe barrenness of a regulated emotion than the hollow echoes of what had ceased to be.

"When I think what Amelia has meant to invalids like Mrs. Sanborn, I know that no one can ever take her place," said Marilla. Her voice was not quite steady as she spoke, though it was not the thought of Amelia that made it tremble.

"The substitute nurse is not doing very well, I know," said Seth. "Mr. Osburn tells me there 's a young woman graduated last year from the hospital in North Conway who wants to do rural work, and they 're thinking of trying her."

He went into more detail about the qualifications of the nurse as he put the screen in front of the fire in preparation for going upstairs to bed. As she listened to him without comment, Marilla reflected that the day which had begun a new life for Amelia had ended for Seth and herself with the merest trivialities of everyday existence.

In the thawing and freezing of the early spring, Jim

Sanborn slipped and fell on the icy slope between the barn and the house and broke his hip. Through April his daughter, with what help Amelia's successor could give, had cared for him and for her bedridden mother. Early in May, Mr. Fox, finding the situation not to his taste, disappeared and was not seen again. His existence had been a reality to few outside his family, and his departure made little more stir than the blowing of a leaf from the tree. Mrs. Fox closed her own home, moved to the other house, and she and Ruby took up their life with the old people. Seth and Marilla helped them with both money and food. Most of the animals had to be sold, for the woman and girl could not care for the two invalids and run the farm as well. The chickens and one cow were kept to provide necessary food, but all the rest were led down the mountain road to serve other masters.

Marilla was coming up the hill to bring something for the invalids the day the two horses went. Ruby and Mrs. Fox stood at the window watching them go. Ruby's tears were flowing fast, but Mrs. Fox's white face seemed almost without expression. Marilla was shocked to see how haggard she had grown. She already looked older than the wasted little woman with the bright eyes, who lay in the kitchen bedroom, imperiously calling out directions about everything that went on in the house. The sitting room across the entrance hall had been turned into a bedroom for Jim, and there he lay, uncomplaining, day after day. He was covered with warm blankets which Marilla had brought when she saw how small and inadequate the stove in the corner was. Ruby had to saw and chop wood for hours each day to supply fuel to keep the house hot enough for the sick old people to whom warmth was one of the few comforts left in life.

"They will have to go to the almshouse next winter," thought Marilla to herself. "Even Mrs. Fox's iron de-

termination cannot put strength into her exhausted body to carry all this burden."

She found Mrs. Fox quietly appreciative of the big basket of cooked food which she had brought. The talk of the two women never went below the surface of life, but there was in the consciousness of both the memory of a deeper intimacy in which each had seen something in the other both to admire and to respect.

Marilla said a few words to Mrs. Sanborn, and then crossed into Jim's room. The old man lay on a low pillow with his eyes closed. Marilla thought for a startled moment that he had just died. The skin on his forehead was so tightly drawn across the bones that the gaunt understructure stood out like a weathered skull. His face, unshaven for weeks, had the cloudy whiteness of faded tan under the thin scraggy beard, and the hollows in the cheeks made the bones under the eyes stand out as though sculptured with a chisel.

"He suffers so much," said Mrs. Fox, in a low voice, as she stood by the bed. "I can't seem to do anything to help him."

Jim opened his eyes at the sound of voices and tried to smile a welcome.

"How are you feeling?" asked Marilla, moving closer and putting her hand on his for a moment.

"Poorly," he answered feebly. "I don't seem to get any strength to mend my bones. The new nurse wants I should go to the hospital down to Concord, but if I 've got to die I 'd like to die here, where I was born."

"You 're not going to die, you 're going to get well," said Marilla, with the exaggerated optimism which helpless sickness often inspires in the onlooker.

The old man made no reply, but he closed his eyes as if for answer. Marilla and Mrs. Fox talked a little, and Mrs. Fox showed her father some fresh fruit Marilla

had brought. "This will give you an appetite," she said, coaxingly, "so you 'll want to drink your milk."

He opened his eyes again and looked at Marilla as he said, "Mr. Walton 's a good friend to me. I always did try to help him out," he added in a stronger voice. "I knew more 'n any of 'em about them machines. They say he 's got new ways now. I 'm too old to understand. I can't help him any more."

The exertion of talking seemed to have exhausted his strength, and he closed his eyes again and lay still.

Mrs. Fox drew Marilla from the room. They stood a moment at the front door, looking out at the sunny yard which was just beginning to be shaded by the tiny unfolding leaves of the trees.

"He never complains," said Mrs. Fox, with a hurried breath. "He 's always quiet and gentle. When I have a minute to rest, I go in and sit beside him. Then I feel better."

Marilla made no comment. They could hear from the other room Mrs. Sanborn scolding Ruby, her feeble voice mingling with the girl's vigorous protests of denial.

"I 'll go in to visit with your mother for a little while," suggested Marilla. At Mrs. Fox's nod of assent she crossed the kitchen, where Ruby was at work blacking the stove, and stepped into the bedroom.

Mrs. Sanborn was lying high on her pillows, her face flushed with disapproval. She greeted Marilla with complaints about the way Ruby did things. The girl would insist on blacking the stove when it was cold, and nothing her grandmother said would make her change her way.

"She knows I can't get out of this bed, and make her do it right," she ended, querulously. Marilla made some soothing remark and tried to divert her by retailing the gossip of the town. The Lewis house and barn on the outskirts of Lovell had been burned to the ground the

night before, but all the animals and most of the furniture had been saved; the middle-aged milliner, whose shop was near the station, was to be married and go to Concord to live; the Thompsons had sold their place, which had been in their family for four generations, to some summer people, who were fixing it up, putting porches in front and back and screening them with copper wire which was guaranteed not to rust. Mrs. Sanborn listened with interest to a description of the big addition to the mill and of the new cloth which was in such demand, but her eye was hostile when Marilla spoke of the Polish workers who were coming to Lovell to run the new machines.

"Some of the Poles who have been here several years are being promoted to positions as foremen," said Marilla, cheerfully. "One of them, Stanislaw Lewenopski, is going to be one of the best men in the mill. My husband says he can manage the workers better than any foreman he's got. His wife was a pupil of mine in the River School. Perhaps you've heard Ruby speak of Ewa Zabka?"

"No, I ain't never talked with Ruby about Polander children," said Mrs. Sanborn, tartly. "I suppose she works in the mills like all the rest of 'em."

Marilla laughed. "Some of those that work in the factory like it better than working at home, but Ewa does n't. She has three little children and spends most of her time scrubbing and cooking and taking care of her sickly baby, but she never complains. She loves the children and she's proud of Stanislaw because he goes to night school and is learning to read and write English. Every time I go to see her she tells me what a fine American her husband is getting to be. He has rented two more rooms for them to live in so that they can have a parlor like their New Hampshire neighbors, he reads the Lovell newspaper, and the last time I saw her she told

me he had bought a flag to hang in the kitchen where the children can look at it every day."

Mrs. Sanborn said nothing, but lay quiet on her pillow, looking at Marilla with a bright unwinking stare.

"Is n't it good that they want to be Americans?" asked Marilla.

"Flags don't make folks Americans," answered the old woman, shortly. "Furriners are furriners."

"Mrs. Rogers would have said that, too, a year ago," remarked Marilla, in a conciliatory tone. "But I can see she 's changing her mind. Perhaps you will, too, when you know some of them better. We 're all a good deal alike under the skin, whether we 're born in New Hampshire or in Poland."

Mrs. Sanborn remained stubbornly silent as though such ideas were not worth an answer, and after a few more words Marilla took her leave.

Mrs. Fox walked out with her to the car.

"How did the doctor say your father was doing?" Marilla asked, as she turned to say good-bye.

"He thinks Pa won't live much longer. I 'm glad. He suffers too much. The doctor gave me some medicine to ease the pain. That 's why Pa sleeps and is still most of the time. I love my father, but I 'll be glad when he lies quiet in his grave."

Marilla took the toil-worn hand and pressed it close.

"You 're a good daughter," she said.

Mrs. Fox's hand lay passive in hers, but there was a moment's softening of the tragic expression in the woman's face.

Throughout the drive home Marilla's thought divided itself between the doomed family on the mountain side, from whom everything had been taken away save the resolution with which to endure, and the immigrant family of Lewenopski in the tenement, working with hope

and enthusiasm to become inheritors of the New Hampshire country and worthy carriers of its great tradition. In such a sequence the past and the future become one, showing in the passing generations only faint traces of the welding forces of the present which are bringing them together.

## CHAPTER XIII

On the last day of August Jim Sanborn died, and was buried in the little walled-in burying ground at the edge of the pasture, but Marilla was not there to join the group of mourners who stood at the rim of the grave while the words of commitment were said. The first news of the end reached her three weeks later at a hill town in Central Italy where she was spending a few days before going on to Rome.

The preceding June, Marilla had been invited by the Osburns to accompany them on a two months' trip to Europe. She had demurred at first and refused to go. Her capacity for enthusiasm seemed to have mysteriously waned. Not even the prospect of seeing the countries of which she had read since she was a child had power to rouse her. She was like an unstrung harp whose strings no longer vibrate when they are struck. But in the end she had yielded to Seth's insistence. When the decision to go was finally made, she threw herself into her preparations with the relief of one who turns from introspection to the fresh openness of action. At the last she suffered a little stabbing pain in the thought that Seth secretly welcomed a few months when he would not have to wrestle with any problem greater than that accompanying the production and sale of woven cloth.

"Perhaps I 'll come back different," she whispered as they parted.

Mr. Osburn was shouting a farewell message to him from the gangplank.

"You 'll have a good time," Seth had said, hastily, and kissed her good-bye.

As the boat backed from the dock, it seemed to Marilla that he turned away sooner than the other watchers and

disappeared. She knew he had a business engagement to keep before he took his train, but he had not said it was pressing. The little incident stuck uncomfortably in her mind. Of course there was no reason to worry about him. Mrs. Barnes would make him perfectly comfortable. He had urged her to forget him and enjoy herself to the full. She knew he was trying, by his casual words, to minimize any future anxiety, but she thought it would have made her happier if he had shown more reluctance to see her go. She tried not to think of what she was leaving behind her but to lose herself instead in the distracting activity of travel.

She carried Seth's brief letter about Jim Sanborn's death with her to a hill behind the town where an olive orchard provided a meagre shade from the hot sun, and there she read it again. Even after her father's death, Seth wrote, Mrs. Fox had refused to be helped. She had sold enough wood to pay the interest on the mortgage. Ruby and she had raised some potatoes, and with the sale of the apples from the gnarled old trees sprawling down the side of the mountain and of such butter and eggs as they could spare they would live through the winter. The old woman would not have to go to the poorhouse. Marilla, reading, could picture Mrs. Fox, wasted but indomitable, guarding her mother to the last.

Marilla looked at the unfamiliar landscape in front of her with a sense of relief from tension. Its soft distances and gray-green slopes reminded her only slightly of the country from which she had come. The great white oxen with their spreading horns ambling along the road below her, the bright-scarfed peasant girls, the smiling, dark-eyed men, belonged to a world in which she had no part. These foothills of the Apennines sheltered a people that had no need of her or of her kind.

Even her picture of herself and Seth as broken links

in the great chain of life whose beginning and end no man could know was less a pain than a strange fancy on this quiet hillside. It must have been in denser woods than these that the forest mother, her baby in her arms, fought off the enemy and frantically sought for food that the chain might not be broken. The mountains beyond might have sheltered the cave man and woman guarding the adventurous footsteps of a child that should be the next link in the endless series. The nomad, wandering across the desert, must have reared his son to follow the flocks and in turn bring a child into the world who should, through the medium of his own slender body, unite the past and the future indissolubly into one. The tent, the igloo, the hovel of mud, the log cabin, the bamboo shed, the cottage, the manor house, the cream-colored villa in the trees below her, were not constructed to house men and women who were the end of the great procession. They were built to shelter for a moment of time the bearers of the spark of life which was to be handed on from generation to generation.

In this ancient land Marilla felt anew the antiquity of her own past. From as far back as thought could carry, the chain had held. Through unimaginable vicissitudes of flood and fire, heat and cold, famine and disease, war and persecution, no single link had broken between that incredible remoteness and Seth and herself in the little mill town of Lovell in this twentieth century of the Christian Era. Through all those ages men and women had loved their children, fiercely and covetously, had protected them with their own bodies, and had centred their lives about the helpless creatures who carried the promise of the future. For the moment Marilla could think of that line, so imperiled, so tenuous, so persistent, coming to an end in the white house on the rocky New Hampshire hillside as though it did not concern herself. Life as she had been

seeing it in these tumultuous weeks was too varied, too pressing, too multitudinous, to allow the disappointments of individuals to count for much. "Except to themselves!" thought Marilla, looking at the distant hills with musing eyes.

When the time had come for the Osburns to return, Marilla surprised them by saying that she was planning to stay some months longer.

"I have written to Seth," she said briefly. "He is willing and I want to stay. He may come over next summer and go back with me."

She vouchsafed no other explanation and they parted from her, mystified and critical.

"I don't believe she cares for him at all," said Mrs. Osburn, emphatically, to her husband. "She probably married him for his money and now she means to spend it."

"It probably is n't very exciting to be married to a man who thinks nothing but wool from morning to night," answered Mr. Osburn. "You forget how lucky you are to have a husband who likes your pet dog. The Waltons have n't so much as a cat!"

Marilla saw them go without regret. She found a certain satisfaction in cutting off the connections with her past. Her listless mood was leaving her. She was finding new life and interest in the strange environment and did not want to be reminded of morbid memories. Only the letters from Seth, brief but kindly, came to remind her that she had roots in another world than this one of beauty and charm in which she wandered at will.

After the Osburns had parted from her, she had gone to Venice and thence down the Adriatic to Ravenna. There she had lingered, fascinated by the Byzantine churches with their colonnades, their mosiacs and their cupolas, their dark, rich interiors and their glowing altars.

She had felt dimly through their beauties the quality of a faith which had been elaborated and developed through centuries to fit the human need. She thought of the plain steepled church in Lovell with its doctrine as bleak as its whitewashed interior and ceased to wonder that it had never played much part in her life. Her craving emotion had found small comfort in the chilly offerings of reason. She sought for peace of the spirit in the calm of the dimly lighted basilicas and always came out through the swinging doors quieted, but she felt a vague shrinking from the background of religious mysticism which she could feel but not understand. The builder whose faith expressed itself in the churches of Ravenna used symbols unintelligible to the daughter of the New England Puritans.

There were times, as she moved about the ancient city, when she felt a remoteness from her own past that was terrifying. In Lovell she had shrunk from contacts with people in dread of chance words which might stab a secret hurt. Here, unknown and disregarded, she was protected, in spite of her growing familiarity with the common speech, from words that could either hurt or heal.

The barrier of language drove her more and more to read the faces of those about her for the communion which the spoken word denied. The vivid emotion in the expressions of the vivacious Italians held her fascinated attention. Anger, pleasure, joy, distaste, were mirrored in turn. As the weeks passed, she grew more observant of fine shades of feeling and more discriminating.

She was walking one afternoon in the side streets of a little town when she came unexpectedly round a corner and saw a young girl by a wall fountain, an empty water jar in her hand, looking up at a slim boy who stood be-

side her. Her dark eyes were fixed upon her companion's face with an intensity that was like blindness. Everything was blotted out except the one image to which her impassioned look clung.

Marilla experienced a shock. She laid her hand on the wall beside her as if for support. A flush passed over her face. She felt suddenly as if the veil of life's deepest intimacies had been rent before her eyes. The New England wife with her controlled emotions and her studied repressions had caught a flashing glimpse of primitive ardor that shook and unnerved her. Could love be that rapturous madness to one who yielded wholly to its enchantment?

In a confusion of agitated thought she passed the two, who were oblivious of her existence. What might life be to her and to Seth if she could forget grief and turn to him with such utter self-forgetfulness! She remembered their early married days and the tenderness of his face when they were alone. What potential richness she had sacrificed to the barrenness of disappointment!

As she followed the street, which ran between high walls over which was visible the green of garden trees, Amelia's remembered words of censure rang in her ears. She tasted again the bitterness of their rebuke. "Your own heart must show you the way." Was she cold and unloving where other women were tender? Or had she yielded helplessly to grief and refused the leading of her affections? There was no one to answer her questions. Her solitude was not only physical, but spiritual. She was in a world in which no one was aware or cared that she had griefs to hide.

Her days, which were filled with new impressions and activities, held a kind of happiness, but the nights, haunted by a recurring dream that she was alone in an empty world, often left her listless and depressed for

hours after she woke. The memory of Seth and of the life which was waiting for her in Lovell more and more possessed her mind. But for the moment such recollections brought her neither contentment nor peace.

Then one day, passing a shop window, her eye was caught by a piece of woven cloth which sent her thoughts in a flash to Lovell. Its design was the type for which Seth was searching, simplicity of pattern from the weaver's point of view, and life and grace from the artist's. She hurried to the hotel, not quite daring to trust her own knowledge of Italian, and came back with the porter, who could speak English. Yes, the cloth was modern weaving and for sale. It was woven on a hand loom in a little town in the Apennines. Once a year the woman who wove it brought her cloth to the city to sell. Oh, yes, there were many hand looms still in use in the little towns, some that wove far finer cloth than this. The designs had been handed down in the peasant families from long ago, no one knew how long — some said from the days of Theodoric. The shopkeeper would be glad to tell the signora the names of the towns where the best weaving was done.

Marilla was excited and happy. She would go into the hills and see for herself. Perhaps she would find treasures to take back to Seth that would make her coming welcome. At the thought happiness, like a little bird, began to stir and sing in her heart.

She took the train as far as it would carry her. Then on donkey back or on foot she went from one town to the next, each with its beech and chestnut forests and its summer pasture for the cattle on the heights above. Everywhere she saw the great round wheels of Parmesan cheese for which Emilia was famous piled up in the little shops or loaded on carts to be carried down to the valley below. The cattle were seldom visible, for they stayed in

the distant mountains with their herdsmen until winter had come.

Not every town had weavers, but wherever Marilla discovered a loom in a peasant house she found herself welcome. With shy pride the women showed the American lady their yarns, their dye pots, and the ancient patterns which had been handed down from mother to daughter. Each family had a design which was its treasured possession. No weaver could hope to succeed with one of these patterns except her whose great-grandmothers had pondered and marveled over its intricacies centuries before Garibaldi carried his dying Anita across the marshes at the foot of their mountains.

Marilla realized that in these designs with their repeated roundels, their flowing flower conventions, their quaint paired animals in gracefully curved ovals, she was seeing ancient Saracenic motives, long since forgotten in the seaport cities where the modern world pressed, but preserved in the little hill towns where the Byzantine influence still lived in the tenacious memory of an isolated people. Her enthusiasm grew with the finding of quainter and more unusual designs the deeper she penetrated into the heart of the mountains.

On the hills about the towns wandered small flocks of sheep, the scattered remnants of the thousands which had covered the Adriatic slopes of the Apennines in the great days of Rome. Virgil had sung of just such shepherds as she saw drowsing under the chestnut trees while the white sheep dogs, with the marks of wolf blood in their gaunt frames, guarded the feeding flocks. A woodcutter, who talked to her in the broken English he had acquired in a short stay in America, drew her attention to a cleared strip of land running down the mountain side and over the hills to the valley below, one of the old *tratturi* which had been reserved for the driving of sheep

from their winter to their summer pastures since the time of the Roman emperors. Marilla could see that, in these days of the decay of sheep husbandry in Emilia, the area which had been set apart so long ago was being gradually invaded by the farmer who coveted the unused land for his fodder crops.

As she watched the sheep follow the undulations of the land like slow-flowing water, cropping the short grass as they went, she had moments of feeling close to Seth — not to the Seth of whom she had once dreamed as the father of her child, but to a Seth in whose activities and interests she had been living during this time of wandering on Apennine heights. She thought with new insight of the man whom she had failed to love for himself alone. She knew now that her attitude toward him in the days of their courtship had been a tragic defiance of Nature herself. Wherever her thought turned, she saw that lovers seek each other with an exclusive passion. Nature hides her secret purposes from their ardor and blinds them to everything except the perfections of the beloved. Then in the end, without their willing it, she grants to their mutual absorption the final boon of offspring. But the sequence of life which springs from the possessive emotion cannot be sought or denied of itself without disaster. The children come, not of themselves, but of love. She had asked for the fruit of life, forgetting the roots and leaves which sustain and nourish it, and she had been denied.

While she was in Ravenna, Marilla had sought refuge from moods of depression in the ancient churches with their mysterious lights and shadows and their vague hovering odors of incense, but she had not been able to escape from sad thoughts. Here in the peace of the sunlit hills, going in and out of the simple peasant homes, she felt a kinship to her own past, a gentle drawing to the

life she had put behind her that was like calm after a storm. She gave no name to her new mood. She only reminded herself that the time was drawing near when she would be turning her face to the west and meanwhile there was much she wished to do.

She began to move more rapidly from town to town, gathering samples of weaving and filling blank books with rough sketches of designs, notes on dyes and materials, and suggestions for new combinations of wool yarns with twisted threads of silk and linen. In her letters to Lovell she wrote nothing of this new interest, though it filled her thoughts by day and by night. Forgotten problems with which Seth had wrestled, processes whose imperfections had caused him anxious hours, returned to her memory and sharpened her observation. She went through the manufacturing cities in the valley of the Po, observing not their treasures of architecture but their achievements in the art of weaving. She enlisted the help of American consuls in order to visit the factories where the artificial silk was being made and to get new ideas as to its use. Everywhere she took notes and added to her collection of samples of weaving both old and new.

She hardly knew herself. She moved about with an eagerness such as she had not known for years. Once, coming suddenly face to face with her reflection in a salon lined with mirrors, she was startled to recognize herself in the smiling woman walking towards her. She nodded and smiled at the image in return as though they two held a secret in common, and went still smiling on her way.

From Milan, on a chance suggestion, she had gone south to Calabria in pursuit of old Greek patterns which were reported to be still in use in the shawls woven by the peasants of that region. There she found even more strange and lovely designs than she had hoped and was

tempted far from the beaten track in her search for the choicest examples.

One sunny afternoon she was returning to her inn, after having persuaded a peasant woman to sell her an old ragged shawl of beautiful design, when she met the post boy, riding up the steep road from the valley, seated jauntily astride the bags on his donkey's back. He handed her a cablegram which had come by slow roundabout ways to the little town in the heart of Calabria where she was staying.

She held it with trembling hands, dreading to open the envelope. It was three weeks since she had heard from Seth. She had thought his letters were merely delayed in Naples, but this of course meant that there were no letters, that never again would there be letters for her from him.

The cablegram had the terrible brevity of such messages of tragedy. "Seth very ill with poliomyelitis. Will recover. Legs probably paralyzed. Staying with him until you come." It was signed by Amelia.

Marilla could never distinctly remember what happened in the next few days. She managed to get to Naples somehow. The journey was a blurred memory of gay and unconcerned faces on which she was always trying to impress her desperate need of haste. In Naples the tourist agent took her in charge, found out the first and fastest sailing, engaged her passage from Cherbourg to New York, bought her ticket and put her on the train. At the pier she was handed a second cablegram sent in answer to hers. "Seth out of danger. Not suffering. He is waiting for your return."

Not until the ship moved slowly out of the harbor at Cherbourg, leaving a France wrapped in April mist, did she draw a free breath. Her face was turned toward home at last and she could take time to adjust her thought to the new life that lay ahead. She sat in her steamer

chair in a sheltered corner of the deck or lay in the berth in her stateroom, speaking to no one, answering only necessary questions, absorbed in the intensity of her inner life. Seth and herself! Of whom else could she think in the whole world? She went over their years together, their joys and sorrows, her yielding to grief that bade fair to wreck their lives, his struggle to save her happiness and his own. She grieved for him, but not for herself, as she remembered their happy walks on the hills, their picnics in the woods, their mountain climbs, and thought of what the future held for them. Her joy would be to comfort him for what he had lost and to rejoice for herself in what she had so richly found. She had moments of a mysterious and mystic happiness. A welcome was waiting for her across this hindering sea. Who had put those last words in the cablegram? Was it Amelia taught by love or Seth tender with longing? She dared not hope. One moment she wept for the tragedy to Seth, the next opened her arms to the thought of his need of her, of his dependence upon her woman's love and care. Self was shriveling and burning in the mounting passion to spend all on another.

Hour after hour she lay watching the sea whose surface spread like a smooth elastic skin over the great swells that rose and fell rhythmically beneath it, in a fever to go faster, to drive the sharp prow of the ship more quickly through the green hills that lay between her and home. The other passengers thought her a strange creature. She never looked at any of them. She would stand at the rail smiling at the ocean through tears that rolled unnoticed down her cheeks, or staring at a questioner as though she had heard nothing. She was soon left to the ministrations of the stewardess, who had long since ceased to marvel at any human eccentricity.

Day and night Marilla's thoughts brooded over Seth.

He should be husband and child to her, lover and baby. She would henceforth want no other. She would care for his crippled body and find an outlet for his active mind. His man's life, through her, should go on. The mill would be the absorbing interest of their joint lives. She thought with a thrill of her collection of beautiful weaving in the ship's hold. Though he did not know it yet, she had already begun to play her part.

Her darkest hours came when she asked herself how he would receive her. What would he say when he first saw her? The shadow of dread was on her eyes. He had been worn through the years by her emotions, his heart made heavy by her depressions. Could he forget in a moment, be glad in his sorrow because she had come back to him? She could feel no certainty, and trembled like a child who fears punishment.

The great ship, with its freighted hold and its tiers of decks resounding to the coming and going of many feet, moved steadily on over the quiet sea, carrying its little world of joy and sorrow from shore to shore and leaving behind it a wake of broken waters and a long plume of dissolving smoke to mark for a few brief moments of time its passing that way.

## CHAPTER XIV

When the ship came into the harbor of New York, Marilla looked at the bold and startling sky line of the city with the eye of a stranger. Only Ellis Island, with its low, red-roofed buildings, seemed to speak of home. Through its corridors and scoured immigrant quarters the Onskis and the Zabkas, the Lewenopskis and the Dybiecs, must not so long ago have passed, frightened by the strangeness of the new world, yet full of hope. She thought of the rocky New Hampshire that had awaited them and of the people they found when they arrived, the Rogers and the Sanborns, the Morrisons and the Hiltons, whose ancestors had come by an even more terrifying way with suspicious Indians to welcome them and famine and death to guard their homes.

As the ship moved slowly up the harbor, Marilla, with consecrating tears, dedicated herself anew to the lives she had touched: to Mrs. Fox guarding Ruby on the mountain side that she might preserve untarnished the ideals of her inheritance; to Mrs. Rogers looking with quiet eyes at inevitable pain and death; to Thaddeus and Esther attempting the difficult adjustment of race and religion with love as their only guide; and to Ewa, with her little children about her, eager to acquire the stony acres and to understand the stern traditions of the land of her adoption.

Marilla caught an earlier train than she had expected, and decided to send no word ahead of her arrival. She sat in her seat in a tumult of contradictory feelings, trying to free herself of the conflict between hope and uncertainty in which she had been living for days. Her eyes followed the soft contours of Connecticut and Massachusetts with indifference, but when she saw the rocky

outcrops and the stony pastures of southern New Hampshire she recognized with the thrill of a daughter the land to which she was kin. As the train followed the valleys between the pine-crowned hills, she felt the upsurge of a suffocating emotion in which pain was indistinguishable from joy. Seth with his crippled body was expiating for the denial life had offered to her deepest longing. He was giving her through his sufferings an outlet for the baffled yearning to cherish and protect which had been the source of half her unhappiness. Tragic sacrifice to give his Undine a soul! Let her repay with self-forgetting love and wipe out the memory of the needless misery of the past by a new tenderness of affection.

"Seth! Seth!" she whispered, her heart hurting her with its beats. "Forgive my hardness for the sake of your own dear love."

She tried to put from her the bitterness of memory. The leaves that are scattered can never be assembled again. It is vain to mourn for their loss. Better foster the new foliage which can clothe bareness and hide with its beauty the scars of the leaves that are gone. Marilla's thoughts were weighted with the sorrow of the past but warm with the promise of the future.

The dusk fell rapidly. They were drawing nearer the mountains. Through the window Marilla watched the dim outlines of the rising heights until the lamps, lighted by the brakeman with his long-handled torch, blotted out their forms as completely as though a curtain had been drawn across the glass. She could see nothing but moving blackness, pierced now and then by a pin point of yellow where the light from some distant home penetrated the dark.

When the train stopped at Lovell, Marilla with fast-beating heart stepped from the car. The station was full of the bustle of a small town at the arrival of the main

train of the day. Automobiles stood along the wooden platform. Their headlights, added to the yellow lamps of the station itself, illuminated the observant loungers, the bus drivers with their visored caps, and the emerging passengers, who greeted their friends or looked about as if in search of someone to answer pressing questions.

Marilla held her small bag in her hand and hurried along the platform with head bent, hoping to escape notice. Her cloche hat shielded her face and she slipped quickly into the semidarkness behind the station. The bus man's unrecognizing shout, "Want a hotel, lady? Lovell House 's the best in town," went unanswered and she walked away, drawing a breath of relief as though she had escaped a threatened danger.

It was about half-past nine and many houses along the way were already dark. Some had lights in the upper story only, though a few strollers, walking along the half-lighted street, gave evidence that the habit of early bed was not quite universal. The memory of the decks of the great liner, glowing till the small hours of the morning, came incongruously to Marilla's mind.

The night was chilly, but the air was sweet with April freshness. As she neared her home Marilla caught the faint smell of earth freshly stirred for the first planting.

"It 's an early season," she thought. "Seth must have had the garden ploughed."

She turned in at the gate. The white house, with its graceful fan window and its beautifully proportioned glassed panels beside the door, was dark save for a light in the parlor and another in the bedroom above. Marilla looked through the unshuttered window, holding her breath. Amelia was in the room, alone. She sat in Seth's favorite armchair by the fireplace with some sewing in her lap. The light from the lamp at her elbow shone on the polished surface of the table and was reflected from

the mirror on the wall and from the pewter candlesticks on the mahogany desk. A few embers still glowed on the hearth, but in her absorption in her sewing Amelia had evidently forgotten to feed the fire.

Marilla glanced hurriedly at the curtained window upstairs and pushed open the door. Amelia looking up at the sound saw the cloaked figure framed in the doorway. Marilla could not speak. She stood pale and trembling, her hand on the knob. Amelia sprang from her chair and ran to her. The two women clasped each other close in a silence broken only by whispered inarticulate words of question and reassurance.

Amelia was the first to control her voice.

"Let me tell you everything before you see him. He is much changed. It will be better for you both."

Across Marilla's mood of self-giving fell a dark shadow. She stepped into the room almost as a stranger. Amelia was once more mistress here as she had been when they first knew each other. Marilla felt herself an intruder, terrified by Amelia's grave words. Why was she warning her about Seth, her dear husband, the man who had once loved her above all others? What change had Amelia seen? Marilla trembled. She had left Seth in sick indifference. Was it impossible that she could come back full of tender emotion and find a welcome? Her heart was heavy with fear. The tide of feeling on which she seemed to herself to have been wafted across the ocean died down. She took a chair beside Amelia, shivering, apprehensive, waiting for her to speak.

Amelia described Seth's illness with the matter-of-factness of a nurse reporting symptoms to a physician, though her eyes were on Marilla's face as if looking in part for guidance there. She told of the delay in sending to Vermont for her, of the doctor's failure to diagnose the disease, occurring at the time of year when it is least

frequent, and of the confusion and uncertainty of those first days before the specialist was called. Seth had seemed to be greatly troubled about something and insisted on seeing her alone.

"He begged me not to cable to you," Amelia said. "He did n't think it was best to have you brought back before you were ready to come."

The slow difficult tears rolled down Marilla's face. Then those words in the cablegram on which her heart had been living had not been Seth's! She managed to say, "I was ready. I 'd been ready for weeks, only I did n't know it till I saw the boy coming up the hill," and stopped. There was only one person in the world to whom she could pour out the anguish of self-revelation which that culminating moment had brought.

Amelia went on, as though telling a story that did not concern Marilla and herself, with a description of the terrible melancholy that had come upon Seth when he realized that he would be crippled the rest of his life.

"I don't think he minds it so much for himself," she said. "The doctor has told him that he can go on with his work. He can be carried to the mill, or he may even in time be able to walk with crutches and manage his affairs as well as ever." She hesitated again. "He dreads it for you — and for you and himself," she said. "He wants you to have your own life. He plans to have a permanent attendant so that you can be free to come and go."

Marilla looked at Amelia's kindly face in sick unbelief.

"He felt sure you were happier in Italy than you had been anywhere else. He thought you might live there every winter and perhaps come to Lovell in the summers." Amelia was not looking at her now. She did not wish to be distracted from what she had to say. Her eyes were on the embers of the fire.

"Seth knows you have started back, but I told him no details. I did n't wish to agitate him, and he has asked no questions. I don't think he wanted to know."

Marilla sat as if turned to stone. Her tears were dried upon her face. Amelia, fighting for Seth's chance at happiness, had cut her to the heart. But Marilla felt neither anger nor reproach. She blessed her for the desolating words. Their harshness was the measure of Seth's need. Amelia could not guess the answer that trembled on Marilla's lips, the word that would dissolve the dark clouds of dread and apprehension. That word could be spoken to Seth alone of all the world.

Marilla suddenly got up from her chair.

"Can I go to him now?" she asked. "Can I see him to-night?"

Amelia, prepared for depression and despair, was startled. Marilla's voice had the thrill of youth, the radiance of expectant joy. Behind her drying tears her expression of grief and exhaustion was gone. She smiled at Amelia as if admitting her to a happy secret.

"I have something to say to him," she said. "I want to say it to-night."

Amelia looked anxious and uncertain.

"I think he can stand it," she said doubtfully. "He 's had a quiet day. He slept two hours this afternoon." She added as if in explanation, "He likes to be alone. I stay with him as little as possible. He has to think himself all the way from a strong man to a cripple, and it takes time. He 's had only three weeks. I hope you can help him."

The pity and anxiety in Amelia's heart were evident in every word.

"Oh, I can!" said Marilla, in a half-whisper. Her look was luminous. Amelia, watching her, astonished, thought her manner had the glowing confidence of a bride.

"I want to go to him alone," she added. "I will call you if I need you. You see, I must take care of him now. You have to go to your family." She asked a few hasty questions about the stepchildren, but Amelia could see that she did not listen to the answers.

They went out into the hall. Marilla laid her hand on Amelia's arm.

"It 's these last moments before I see him that are the hardest to bear," she said, with simple poignancy.

Amelia nodded and stood watching her mount the stairs. As she went back into the parlor, she heard a door above open and shut, then a silence in which she could almost hear her own heart beat. She hung over the fire, sick with anxiety, waiting to be called. Could Seth stand the strain of Marilla's evident emotion? Was Marilla bringing more sorrow into this afflicted home or comfort where it was so sorely needed?

## CHAPTER XV

When Marilla, coming from the lighted hall, opened the bedroom door she could see nothing distinctly. The furniture had been shifted and the room looked strangely unfamiliar. Seth's bed had been moved near the window and her own pushed against the wall. The chairs were set stiffly out of the way.

In the dim shaded light she could see Seth lying on the pillow, his hands, white with the pallor of weeks of confinement in bed, crossed on his breast. For one shuddering moment she thought she had come too late. Then she was conscious that, though his head had not moved, Seth's eyes were upon her. She stepped into the room and closed the door, held by the look. There was in it no joy, not even surprise, but instead a shrinking that seemed to involve the whole man.

Marilla was checked for the moment, not by grief for herself, but by a terrible fear clutching at her heart that what she had to bring could not help this anguished and unhappy man. She controlled the surge of emotion in which she had climbed the stairs and walked slowly toward the bed. The deep-set eyes, rimmed with dark circles, followed her motions, but the lips did not move.

She stood beside him, looking down at him.

"Seth, darling, I've come back," she said, in a voice that was tremulous with feeling. "I've wanted to come for weeks. It's as if I were born again. This is where I belong. I found how much I loved you when I was away from you. I don't want anything in life now but you."

Still silence and the unchanging eyes.

Marilla tried to smile.

"The old Marilla was never happy. You know that.

She wanted so many things. The new Marilla has everything." Her look of expectation faded as she felt the unwavering eyes still upon her. She made no move to touch him or draw near, but stood like a child uncertain of welcome. "Can't you believe me?" she said.

The sick man roused himself to speak, though nothing moved except his lips. He looked at her as through separating veils.

"I could n't make you happy when I was a whole man. What hope is there now when I shall be a burden the rest of my days?" The bitterness of weeks of fruitless mental suffering spoke in those words.

A pang of desolating grief swept over Marilla. She was reaping what she had sowed. He could not believe in the reality of her love. Perhaps he could no longer believe in the reality of his own. Marilla swallowed the bitter draught. This was not the time to question him about love or to beg that the old tenderness return. He had terrible need of her. That must be enough.

"Seth, my precious, can't you see?" she said with an intensity that had no tears. "You 'll be my child and lover, too. Oh, Seth, darling, can't you be a little glad to have me yours again?" She sank on her knees beside him, hiding her stricken face in her hands. She could not see the momentary tragedy of his eyes, the look of one who visions what might have been, but she felt the touch of his hand on her bowed head. She seized the hand and covered it with kisses, her face still hidden from his sight.

"Marilla," he said, in a whisper. "Dear Marilla, look up."

She trembled as she raised her face, dreading what she might see. He opened his arms to her with a gesture of helpless offering. The look of the trapped creature was lost in something infinitely tender and touching. Marilla threw herself upon his breast in a passion of love in which

the lesser feelings of pity and penitence could find no place.

She lay long with his arms about her, her cheek pressed to his. Neither spoke. Love's renewal has little need of words. Once she lifted her face wet with tears to say with a smile of tender humility, "You don't need to love me yet, Seth, darling. Let me love you. That will be all I ask."

When she dropped her head beside his again she felt his arms tighten about her. That was answer enough.

"I 've made such wonderful plans," she whispered in his ear. "Such surprises for you! For months I 've been studying weaving in Italy and I 've brought back designs to make our mill the finest in the country. You 'll hardly believe how much I 've learned. Why did I turn my back on the dear old mill in those sad, bad days? It 's going to be your mill and mine after this — that is, if you want me." She interrupted herself, looking up with a timidity new to her, as if to make sure of his assent. He drew her to him with a reviving strength that said more than words. She went on pouring loving confidences into his ear, stopping now and then to kiss his cheek with a passion that seemed to put new life into his weakened frame.

When Amelia, anxious for her patient, came upstairs, she persuaded Marilla to leave Seth for a time to rest. The two together prepared the bed in the room across the hall.

"You 'll sleep here to-night and let me stay with him, won't you?" said Marilla in appeal. "I must take care of him now."

Amelia hesitated. Her nurse's judgment was against the shift, but she knew there was more than healing of the body which Seth needed.

"I think we 'll risk it," she answered. "I 'll be right

here where you can call me. There 's not much to do for him at night."

They unpacked Marilla's bag and made the house ready for the night. The parlor was fragrant with lovely flowers. "From the men at the mill," said Amelia in answer to Marilla's question. "Some of them come every day to inquire how he is. Stanislaw was here this morning. He brought that bunch of anemones which little Marya picked for Seth. He says Ewa 's expecting another baby soon or she 'd have come with them herself."

As Marilla buried her nose in the pale flowers which carried the fresh fragrance of growing things, she thought with anticipation of the friendships to be renewed in serenity which had been dropped in unhappy tumult of spirit. She walked from room to room taking fond possession once more, straightening the ornaments, rearranging the chairs, putting the books in order, and leaving the marks of her personality on the things of wood and metal as definitely as though she had left her signature on paper. She passed her hand lovingly along the rail of the mahogany sideboard and looked with housewifely distress at the unburnished pewter coffee urn on its top. These were all hers to cherish as were no other beauties in the world — not for their own sake, but for the dear sake of him who lay upstairs in the darkened room waiting for the ministry of her hands.

After Marilla had left him, Seth lay with his eyes closed, not asleep, but exhausted with emotion. The torturing apprehension which had haunted him through three terrible weeks was gone. Its indelible mark was on his soul, but he need think of it no more. He knew now that to Marilla his tragedy had brought no consciousness of intolerable obligation, but only an access of affection. He need no longer dread life for her. He even dared, as he lay motionless on his bed, hope that he might in time be-

come reconciled to life for himself. He was loved at last. Happier to have been loved for his man's self, for the power of his will and the force of his character, but if that which was denied to his strength was granted to his weakness, how could he, who cried out for love as a lost soul for its savior, refuse the tender offering?

He thought of Marilla with the pity which had long been a habit with him and with the painful gratitude of the strong man who must accept tendance when by every instinct of his nature he would give. He vowed for her sake to lighten the burden of his life as much as he could, but the racking thought that she dreaded for herself what lay before her was gone. Some obstacle to happiness within him seemed to be giving way, some hard core of resentment which had blocked the returning flow of affection.

As he rested on his pillow, helpless and heavy with the weight of inert limbs, he found himself listening with reviving interest to the movements outside his bedroom, to the stir and voices across the hall. For weeks which seemed an eternity he had shunned the sight of a human face. He had asked to be left by himself, and alone hour after hour he had wrestled with despair.

When at last he heard Marilla's voice at his door and her hand once more on the knob, he waited, the ghost of a smile on his lips and in his heart the certainty that through the hard years of life left to him he need never be lonely again.

That night Marilla lay awake long after Seth's regular breathing had assured her that he slept. She had drawn her bed next to his and turned on her side, her hand on his, full of thoughts that would not let her rest. The slow emergence of the soul from sorrow seemed to her like the traveler's escape from the enclosing jungle in which he has lost his way. Hopelessness and despair shut him

in. No ray of sunshine penetrates the gloom of the giant forest. He can see neither path nor guiding star. He seems destined to move forever from dark to dark. Then the trees part a little, a narrow shaft of light strikes through thinning tops, and he hears a faint indeterminate stir of life about him. A broad-winged butterfly, flashing promise of the beauty that waits outside the prisoning forest, flits by. The spaces between the trees widen still further. Far away he catches the glint of moving water or the golden warmth of sun on rank-growing grasses, and the silence is broken by the sudden note of a bird singing in the distance. The eye cannot see the singer, but the ear hears, and the heart, which has grown faint in the struggle of the hopeless days, thrills again to the call of life. A little more courage, another triumph over weakness, and the black jungle with its hampering vines and impeding undergrowth will be left behind. The fortunate man or woman who on that dark and torturing way feels the clasp of a sustaining human hand will not sink helpless by the path nor, vanquished, yield to despair before the end is reached.

Marilla, as if in atonement, bent over Seth's hand and touched his wrist lightly with her lips — then lay back and slept, safe at last in the haven of her husband's heart.

The town drowsed under the pale light of the moon, storing its strength for the work of the approaching day. Under the mill the noisy, hurrying water flowed toward the sea, unhampered by the cogs which in the daytime harnessed its speed to the belted wheels in the rooms above. The mill watchman walked from floor to floor with the slow peering habit of the years. He passed his hand gently over the soft cloth on the looms, puzzled at the strange patterns his electric torch revealed. He shook his head as he went down the stairs. "Mr. Walton ain't

stickin' to the ways his grandsir had. Old Mr. Walton would n't of stood for such fancy doin's."

Through the hours while the darkness held there was no stir or sound in the white house on the hill. The softly moving night wind blew the curtains at the open windows of the bedroom gently in and out, and the branches of the tall elms swayed as the currents of air caught their tops above the central chimney.

Below in the valley the lamp burned till dawn in the crowded sleeping quarters over the store where the Lewenopskis made their home. There was hurried passing to and fro between kitchen and bedroom, there were smothered groans and Polish cries for help. When the light in the east began to brighten, Ewa Lewenopski, with sharp pain and scant sympathy, brought her fourth child into the world and, having blindly obeyed the ancient injunction to multiply and replenish the earth, lay spent on her tumbled bed, neither asking nor understanding why it was or what it meant in the eternal ways of the universe.

# HEIRS

## By CORNELIA JAMES CANNON

*Author of RED RUST*

What are the forces at work to-day beneath the surface of New England? Heirs to a Puritan philosophy and a grudging soil, weakened by one hundred years of Western migration and by the competition of new industries—what remains for the descendants of as hardy a race as ever lived? The answer to this human problem—and it is not one of defeat—is the theme of this story by Cornelia James Cannon, author of that distinguished first novel, "Red Rust." It is the story of contrast: the reticent Yankees and the glamorous Poles who are invigorating the old land; the conflict between the conventional old blood and the expansive but ignorant new; tragic sterility opposed to peasant fecundit

The story is centred in the rilla Lamprey, a young school teacher—he ngland tradition—and Seth Walton, ow ited mill; and the narrative reaches into r s, Polish cottages and New Hampshire farms, antique shops and hermit shacks, all bounded by the beauty of the rocky countryside. Its threads form the whole pattern of contemporary New England, not gray and pathetic as it is often represented, but a pattern of strength and contrasting color.

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